

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, CC Docket No. 02-6

Of all the programs and initiatives that I've seen at the FCC in almost nine years of service, I believe E-Rate stands out as the best. I wish we could claim authorship of it as our own, but that would, of course, distort its Congressional origins under the wise and visionary leadership of Senators Rockefeller, Snowe, Exon, Kerrey and Hollings, Congressman Markey, Secretary of Education Dick Riley, and many others. Since its inception in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the E-Rate program has responded to a glaring national need. By connecting schools to the Internet, the E-Rate program plays an absolutely critical role in providing millions of students with the tools necessary for success in the Digital Age. Similarly, by connecting libraries, the E-Rate program helps provide our communities with digital tools necessary to learn, to compete and to prosper. E-Rate has been and continues to be a lifeline for the poorest and hardest-to-reach children and communities that are eager to connect and learn and are at risk of being left behind as technology moves forward.

Despite all its successes, the E-Rate program's job is far from done. While most classrooms have been connected to the Internet—a truly historic accomplishment—some are at the lower end of Internet speed—and some, believe it or not, are still stuck in Dinosaur Dial-up. I don't think any of us wants our kids working and competing on Dinosaur Dial-up while students down the street or in other towns—or countries, for that matter—are enjoying the digital affluence that real broadband can bring to their education and to their preparation for life's tests.

The E-Rate program has been impressively improved along the way, and today the Commission takes another important step forward to realize the lofty goals of its founding fathers and mothers. So I am very pleased to support today's item, which will allow schools to make E-Rate-funded facilities and services available to the general public outside of regular school hours. While the Order allows for this extension of facilities and services to the general public for the next 18-months, I am also pleased that the item includes a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to consider changing the rules to make this option available on a permanent basis. There is no reason why such facilities and services should go underutilized, provided that schools can support the additional use and funding through E-Rate is used for statutorily-intended purposes.

I see this as the first of many items that this Commission will adopt to further the goal of getting broadband to the four corners of this great nation, and I commend Chairman Genachowski for moving forward with this item now. It is a significant down-payment on the soon-to-be-issued National Broadband Plan. I thank my colleagues for their continuing support of the E-Rate program and also the Bureau for its good work in bringing this item to us today. I look forward to seeing more such items in the near future.