

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MEREDITH ATTWELL BAKER**

Re: *Policies to Promote Rural Radio Service and to Streamline Allotment and Assignment Procedures (MB Docket No.09-52); Improving Communications Services for Native Nations by Promoting Greater Utilization of Spectrum over Tribal Lands (WT Docket No. 11-40); Improving Communications Services for Native Nations (CG Docket No. 11-41)*

There is no dispute that the communications needs facing Tribal nations are great. Communications services that many take for granted—something as simple as a dial tone, bars on a mobile phone, and the most basic access to the Internet—are just missing in many areas. The statistics are staggering, with some estimates putting the broadband adoption rate as low as five percent in some parts of Indian Country. When there is Internet access, it is estimated that over 90% of individuals in Tribal communities utilize the Internet at least once a day, much greater than the national average. And for that access, individuals in Tribal lands pay more on average: only 9% pay under \$20 per month for Internet access in Indian Country, compared to 18% nationally, while 11% pay between \$61 and \$80 per month for Internet access, compared to only 1% nationally.

The Commission has recognized these problems repeatedly over the last decade. In a 2000 Policy Statement on our government-to-government relationship with Indian Tribes, the Commission committed at that time to work with the Tribal communities to ensure “that Indian Tribes have adequate access to communications services.” Fast forward to Acting Chairman Copps’ 2009 report, “Bringing Broadband to Rural America,” and the Commission again recognized the “unique issues” associated with broadband deployment in Tribal lands. And most recently in the National Broadband Plan—fast approaching its first birthday—we recognized the need “to support sustainable broadband deployment and adoption in Tribal lands.” Yet we still have Native American communities with the lowest adoption rates in the country, and we are still talking about the problems without proposing any real solutions.

It is time for action, and I hope that includes leaving the confines of the Beltway to hear directly from the people impacted by this digital divide. Given the many different groups represented here today, I am certain there is no one-size-fits-all solution. I commit to consulting directly with the people of the Tribal nations as to how we can best help them, whether it’s by encouraging the deployment of fixed and mobile broadband or promoting adoption and digital literacy.

I am pleased to see the efforts of so many of our Bureaus and Offices, under the guidance and leadership of Geoff Blackwell and the Office of Native Affairs and Policy, to formulate a coordinated framework under which we can proceed. I hope that these proceedings that we initiate today lead to actual, measurable progress in addressing the communications and technology gaps facing Tribal nations.