

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90

One day, about twelve years ago, I was getting my hair cut in a barbershop in Kansas City. Like barbershops around the country, we were having a spirited discussion, much of it about sports, and much of it about the Kansas City Chiefs. As tends to happen with debates about sports, everyone had strong opinions, but not everyone seemed to be working with the same set of facts. So, as I'm getting up from my seat, I suggested that we all go home, look it up on the internet, and the next time I came in for a cut we'd figure out who was right. The shop got quiet, and then people began looking at me puzzlingly. It soon became very real to me that I was the only person in this barbershop with a broadband connection at home.

That experience crystalized a point that sticks with me to this very day – access to affordable broadband is a necessity. Without it, the unemployed can't find and apply for jobs; students can't complete their homework; and patients can't connect to their doctors or get health care information. Those without access are disadvantaged in countless other ways that add up to living on the outskirts of today's digital society. Ensuring that everyone in America has access to affordable broadband is one of my top priorities.

The Commission's Universal Service Program is one of the primary ways we can help get broadband deployed everywhere. The recently-completed Connect America Fund II auction is an important step in getting broadband deployed where it is needed and I congratulate the auction winners. They stepped up to provide broadband service in areas where others decided not to. They agreed to build out over the upcoming six years until broadband reaches everywhere in their winning areas. I appreciate these commitments. I'll be watching closely, both to celebrate progress and to ensure that buildout commitments are met.

Today's order takes critical steps toward starting to fund auctions winners and ensuring that Universal Service dollars are used efficiently. These steps bring us closer to achieving the goal of closing the digital divide. However, much work remains to be done, both in rural and urban areas. Rural and remote areas of America are some of the costliest to serve and have less service than urban areas. But make no mistake, there are many urban areas that lack the kind of quality and affordable broadband service needed to take part in digital society. I am committed to finding solutions that will bring quality, affordable broadband everywhere in America.

My thanks to the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for your tireless efforts and commitment to getting people connected to broadband and for your work on this item.