

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Connect America Fund, Alaska Connect Fund, Universal Service Reform—Mobility Fund*, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 23-328, 14-58, 09-197, WT Docket No. 10-208, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order (October 19, 2023)

It's simple. Broadband must reach all Americans everywhere. This is particularly clear for those that live in Alaska, which faces a unique combination of challenges due to its environment and landscape. I know, because I recently saw the challenges first-hand when I visited earlier this summer. I was awed by the beauty of the Kenai Peninsula, but also struck by its remoteness. And fast-changing weather nearly resulted in me spending three extra days in Bethel. I learned the difficulty in connecting some of the small villages when I visited Oscarville, with 80 residents, and Napaskiak, with 400. Both villages are accessible solely via boat, and I was surprised to learn that nearly half the population are children. I remember watching as one father drove by on his ATV with five kids hanging on the back.

The Alaska Plan has been a success, with 15 rate-of-return carriers and eight wireless providers participating. But, more work remains, and with the Alaska Plan winding down, now is the right time to ask questions about what future support in Alaska should look like. So, I'm happy to support this NPRM, which proposes to create the Alaska Connect Fund.

I'm also glad that we ask questions about how to support broadband going forward in a world where Alaska was allocated over one billion dollars from BEAD. We must ensure that we are not wasting scarce Universal Service Fund dollars with duplicative spending. The *Notice* properly asks questions about middle mile support, the role of direct-to-home satellite broadband, and public interest obligations. I'm also heartened to see questions about whether we should require Tribal Consent and that we again propose, following my urging in other Universal Service Fund proceedings, to require providers receiving funds from the Alaska Connect Fund to adopt and maintain operational cybersecurity and supply chain risk management plans. Networks built with federal funds must be secure.

This *Notice* is a strong step toward achieving our goal of getting Alaska fully connected. I support the item and thank the Commission's staff for their great work.