

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

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

One of the Commission's most important responsibilities is closing the digital divide – I am laser-focused on this work. The Commission's Universal Service program is our best tool to ensure that everybody everywhere has access to quality affordable broadband. But we must also be mindful that many Americans rely on voice service, which the Universal Service fund also supports. In fact, during a recent visit to my hometown of Kansas City, a resident approached me at the end of an event and spoke passionately about the importance of traditional voice telephone service to elderly local citizens.

The rate floor that today's order eliminates was adopted in 2011 to ensure fair allocation of Universal Service voice support. It prevented voice service providers receiving support from the Universal Service High-Cost fund from gaming the system by charging unrealistically low rates and depending too heavily on Universal Service to pay their costs. The rate floor was an important part of the changes to Universal Service the FCC adopted in 2011, and I'm glad to see that today's order now acknowledges its origin and role. But, the Universal Service fund has undergone major changes since then and it's not clear to me that the rate floor still serves enough of a purpose that it should remain on the books and require some voice service providers to either raise their rates sharply this summer or have their Universal Service support reduced.

I'm also glad that today's order now includes a rate reporting requirement, so we can see whether voice service providers adopt artificially low rates in response to elimination of the rate floor. I will be watching to make sure that voice service providers do not take advantage of the Universal Service fund after the rate floor is gone. We owe it to people, schools, libraries, hospitals, and clinics on the wrong side of the digital divide to make sure that every Universal Service dollar is used to get quality affordable broadband to as many people and places as possible.

I appreciate the hard work that went into preparing this order, and I thank the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau.