

Our students need deep discounts for telecommunications services this year.

I urge the FCC to fully support of the Joint Board's discount plan for universal service for schools and libraries.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven Sceiford". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Steven Sceiford  
522 Nobel Ave  
Erie, PA. 16511  
814-898-2095

**Leo J. Muir Elementary School**  
2275 S. Davis Blvd.  
Bountiful, Utah 84010

CE 96-485

**Ofelia G. Wade, Principal**

(801) 299-2010

APR 21 2 38 PM '97

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OFFICE OF  
COMMISSIONER  
SUSAN NESS

**April 2, 1997**

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MAY 1 1997

**The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054**

**Dear Commissioner Ness,**

**As public school teachers, we write in support of meaningful discounts on telecommunications services for schools and libraries so that every school child and life-long learner can have access to the world of information technology. The Telecommunications Act--through its Universal Service Fund provisions--mandates the development of special discount rates for all schools and libraries so that they can secure services at affordable prices.**

**Educators know that advanced telecommunications services are important to improving learning, sparking the imagination and leveling the playing field for all of our nation's children. Affordable access to technology in all classrooms and libraries will assure that our children and life-long learners can connect with the technology they would need to compete in today's and tomorrow's workforce. Advanced telecommunications services in the classroom will also create informed and skilled consumers of new technology well into the 21st century.**

**Last November, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service sent to the FCC a set of recommendations for implementing the Universal Service Fund provisions related to schools and libraries. These recommendations would give our learning institutions significant discounts on all services that are commercially available, with deeper discounts for those schools and libraries least able to pay and more expensive to service. All schools would get discounts on connections to classrooms and Internet connectivity, both of which are essential to providing the most advanced learning opportunities to the greatest number of students.**

We urge your support for the Joint Board's recommendations. Taken as a whole, they will provide affordable discounts for a full range of services, and give schools and libraries flexibility in choosing the services needed to meet each community's diverse needs. Most importantly, these provisions, if adopted by the FCC, will make advanced technology for learning available to all Americans.

Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Leo J. Muir Elementary  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Suzanne Tanner  
Sharon Lampton  
Sherry Hulse  
Raelynn Swenson  
Koranne DeLuange  
Dorothea M. Eiting  
Maradene B. Heap  
Marcia Murbach  
Lizyn Johnson Ganett  
Mike Paay  
Marcy Bradshaw  
Ila Devereaux  
Kathleen Berry  
Angela Edwards  
Janet Eggus

Vicky Kincaid  
Valery Burnett  
Luzi Blade  
Kaye Bonner  
Gleba Y. Wade  
Lawn Jassen  
Sherra Stuy  
John Asborn



# Antelope Elementary School

1810 South Main St.  
Clearfield, Utah 84015  
Telephone: 801-774-7484

Ross G. Quist  
Principal

CC 96-45

April 2, 1997

The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054

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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Antelope Elem.  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Dorothy Moore  
Jenni Howard  
Pat Larson  
Lonnita Walker  
Valerie Patton  
Lynda Kung'oor  
Sharma Miller  
Karen L. Naima  
Lilli Mortensen  
Kathy Thorne  
Nede O'Brien  
Lisa Richardson  
Mary Ann Humphrey  
Jill Fleming  
John Cook

Suey Henderson  
Janice [unclear]  
Monica Armitage  
Robin Butler  
Julie Hammer  
Dye Shagan  
Jonna Sherman  
Wendy Armstrong  
Norma Anderson  
Hebber Smith  
Linda [unclear]  
Barbara [unclear]  
Judy [unclear]  
Susan Sparks

# Hamilton Community Consolidated School District No. 328



FAX COVER SHEET

Susan Knight  
Superintendent

DATE: April 10, 1997

TO: The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW, Room 844  
Washington, DC 20554

FROM: Dr. Susan Knight, Superintendent  
HAMILTON C. C. SCHOOL DIST. #328  
FAX #: 217/847-3915

NUMBER OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER SHEET: 2

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
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COMMISSIONER  
SUSAN NESS

# HAMILTON COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 328

SUE KNIGHT, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
270 N. 10th St.  
217-847-3315

April 10, 1997

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LEE HOFFMAN  
Principal  
High School  
1100 Keokuk St.  
217-847-3313

The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW, Room 844  
Washington, DC 20554

DALE BARNARD  
Principal  
Middle School  
270 N. 10th  
217-847-3314

Re: CC Docket No. 96-45

Dear Commissioner Ness:

MARCIA  
SCHIEFERDECKER  
Principal  
Elementary School  
1830 Broadway  
217-847-3811

I am a superintendent from Hamilton Community Consolidated School District No.328 in Hamilton, Illinois. I appreciate your dedication in ensuring that all school districts will have affordable access to the Information Superhighway.

Board Members:

Mark Menn  
President

Minor Garrelts  
Vice President

Ronald Starr  
Secretary

David Boussalot  
Steve Buntjen  
Kim Coover  
Michael Gray

The Telecommunications Act and the Federal-State Joint Board decision will guarantee that all school districts will have the opportunity to connect to the Internet and provide distance-learning opportunities. The \$2.25 billion a year will address the needs of all our schools and will bring services directly to the classroom where students learn. Your inclusion of internal classroom connections for discounts is vital. This plan is essential for preparing the workforce of tomorrow.

District No.328 is making every effort to integrate global communications opportunities into the instructional program. The scope of this program will be severely limited or perhaps even short-lived without this discount plan.

Deep discounts for telecommunications services to schools are needed this year. I urge the FCC to fully support the Joint Board's discount plan for universal service for schools.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dr. Susan Knight, Superintendent  
Hamilton Community Consolidated  
School District No.328



# Southern Prairie

## Area Education Agency 15

2814 North Court Street  
Ottumwa, Iowa 52501-1194  
(515) 682-8591  
800-622-0027  
FAX (515) 682-9083  
WEB site: <http://www.aae15.k12.ia.us>

Serving school districts in the counties of Appanoose, Davis, Jefferson, Keokuk, Lucas, Mahaska, Monroe, Van Buren, Wapello and Wayne

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OFFICE OF  
COMMISSIONER

**Dr. Harold Westra**  
Chief Administrator

To: The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner

**Mr. Leon Maxson**  
Director  
Media Center

From: Leon Maxson  
Director, Division of Media Services

Date: April 15, 1997

**Dr. Larry Keele**  
Director  
Special Education

Re: CC Docket No. 96-45

**Dr. Sue Palmer**  
Director  
Educational Services

I am a Director of Media with emphasis on technology. We have had a hard time in convincing our legislators in Iowa the importance of internet access for professional educators and students, especially remote dial up. At this time, there are many inequities in internet access depending on if you are rural or a large city. The cost is prohibitive. We need to leave the decision in the hands of local districts to determine their needs and whom the service provider is depending on their educational mission and needs.

We support the Telecommunication Act and the Federal-State Joint Board decision which will guarantee that all school districts will have an equal opportunity as well as an equitable one. Your inclusion of internal classroom connections for discounts is vital.

Our agency is an internet service provider for both direct connect and remote dial up access for professional staff. However, our knowledgeable legislators have seen fit to eliminate the remote dial up access for both professional staff and students at the request of the telephone companies. Our service is free to the educational community (professional staff and students) and the telecos feel we are taking money out of their pockets. If we can't provide the service free, we need deep discounts for telecommunication's service for our local school districts.

**Mission Statement:**  
To Enhance  
Excellence and  
Equality in the  
Educational  
Opportunities  
Available to all  
Children through  
Leadership,  
Cooperation and  
Efficient and Effective  
Services to Approved  
Schools

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**Canon CLBP 360PS Low to Mid Volume Color System:** Redefining the color printing standard, the Canon Color Laser Beam Printer 360PS provides superior quality which, until now, has yet to be seen in the color printer marketplace. **Summary:** Full color Network laser printer, 3 copies per minute in color-12' cpm in B & W, PostScript Level II, 100 MHz built in Fiery Controller, PC, Macs and UNIX.



**Canon CLC 320 Low to Mid Volume Color System.** The new Canon CLC 320 laser copier/printer/scanner provides high-end capabilities for tight budgets. **Summary:** Full color copier, 5 copies per minute, 2 sided copying, RDF, 35mm Film Projector available. Does interface with computer.



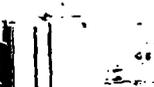
**Canon CLC 700S Low to High Volume Color System.** The new Canon 700S laser copier/printer/scanner is the solution for high quality digital color laser output at an affordable price. **Summary:** Full color copier, 7 copies per minute, 2 sided copying, 90lb paper, transparencies through cassette, RDF & 20 bin sorter. Does interface with computer.



**Canon CLC 700L Low to High Volume Color System.** The new Canon 700L laser copier/printer/scanner brings high volume color printing and copying within your reach. **Summary:** Full color copier, 7 copies per minute, Auto Duplex, 90lb paper, transparencies through cassette, RDF and 20 bin sorter. Large Paper Supply. Does interface with computer.



**Canon CLC 800S Low to High Volume Color System.** The new Canon 800S laser copier/printer/scanner pushes digital color laser output quality and reliability to new heights with its wide range of features, the productivity of its 7-copy-per-minute speed and automatic duplexing capabilities. **Summary:** Full color copier, 7 copies per minute, Auto Duplex, 90lb paper, transparencies through cassette, RDF and 20 bin sorter. Does interface with computer.



**Canon CLC 1000 Color High Volume Production Color System.** At 31 cpm (Color/B&W) without any reduction in quality, the CLC 1000 laser copier/printer/scanner features Auto Duplexing (up to 999 sheets), photograph like output on up to 110 lb. index card, full bleed capability (11 X 17) and a standard capacity of 5,250 sheets of paper. Optional Accessories are available for even more enhanced performance. **Summary:** Full color copier, 31 copies per minute, Auto Duplex, 110lb. index, transparencies through the cassette, RDF and 20 bin stapler/sorter. Interfaces with computer.



**Canon BJ2436 Large Format Color System.** With the ability to produce copies from originals as large as 24 x 36 inches, the Color Bubble Jet Copier 2436 is the perfect solution for customers generating large format color in-house. **Summary:** Oversized Bubble Jet, output 24 x 36, 6 minutes per copy. Does interface with computers.



**ColorPASS Controllers: 320, 2000+, 3000+, 4000+, and 8000.** These controllers provide computer connectivity for Canon color systems. Configurations range from the easily expandable ColorPASS-2000 controller delivering high-quality Canon Color Laser output, on up to the **new ColorPASS-8000 controller**, a top-of-the-line system designed to process enormously complex files and meet expanding color printing needs. **Summary:** Turns Canon color copier into a high quality Network printer w/Adobe Postscript processing, direct to copier printing and network support for Mac, PC & UNIX, Includes Scanning, Spooling and Job Management tools.



**The GP30F and New GP200F Multifunction Devices** are Total Network Document Management Systems which provide the most productive ways to create, print, duplicate and communicate hard copy and electronically generated information in a connected environment. **Summary:** Scan, Print, Sort, Staple, Copy, Fax without leaving your computer.

- In 1996, the U.S. Government selected Canon for one its highest energy conservation distinctions: "Energy Star Partner Of The Year"
- **Evidence of Client Confidence in Canon:**
  - Selected to Fortune Magazine's "1996 Most Admired Corporations"
  - Canon is the industry's **No. 1** performer at \$23 billion in sales
  - Canon is ranked **No. 1** in the industry for Research investment (\$5 million/day)
  - Canon is ranked **No. 2** worldwide in Patents by the U.S. Patent Office



L. C. Reading Elementary  
360 West 2025 North, Centerville, Utah 84014  
Phone: 299-2030 Fax: 299-2663  
Craig L. Poll, Principal

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SUSAN NESS

CC 96-45

APR 15 4 48 PM '97

April 2, 1997

The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054

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MAY 1 1997

Federal  
Communications Commission

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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Reading  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Margie Humphrey  
Kathy Andersen  
Verna H. Taylor  
Julie Huang  
Alice Ripplinger

Sharon Lawrence

Jimalea Webb

Lorraine Raymond

Margie Humphrey

May E. Spina

Gay Colb

Denise DeSanto

Charlotte Madsen

Jennifer Burdett

Peggy Hyde

Faina Ormrod

Diana DeFries

Linda Porter

Alice Halterman

Michelle

Annette Hamm

Ann Miller

Linda Williams

Judy Kelly

Rosalind Draper

Judi Lundy

Leslie Goff

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MAY 1 1997

Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20541

April 2, 1997

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Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054

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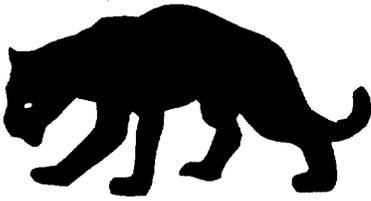
Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Davis High  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Elayne J. Furlinson  
D.S. De  
Dacia Whitesides  
Hall  
Sutherland  
Wendy Jensen  
Jeffrey C. Hollett  
Aimee K. Barnett  
J. Michael Shaw  
Shanda Steen  
Corine L. Taylor  
Janessa Pyall Fisher

Erast H. Steen  
Mary King  
Michael A. Brown  
Pamela A. Col  
Volita L. Boen



# South Clearfield Elementary School Panthers

CC 96-45

Dick C. Close  
Principal

990 East 700 South  
Clearfield, Utah 84015  
(801) 774 - 7417

April 2, 1997

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MAY 1 1997

The Honorable Susan Ness, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054

Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

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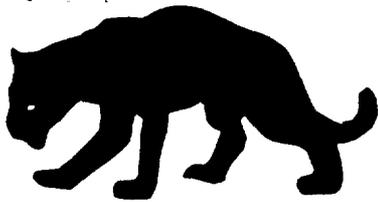
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COMMISSIONER  
SUSAN NESS

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# South Clearfield Elementary School Panthers

990 East 700 South  
Clearfield, Utah 84015  
(801) 774 - 7417

Dick C. Close  
Principal

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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

South Clearfield Elementary  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

Linda Bakken	Jara Gledhill	Kathy Bunch
Zyette Van Dyke	Lisa Story	
David W. Baker	Janna Cutler	
Of Franco	Tronnie Myznan	
Michelle Hennige	Debbie Williams	
Doralee Cox	Dick C. Close	
Stana W. Brown	Linda R. Bingham	
Mildred W. Bates	Charlayne Flint	
Heather Dalton	Steph M. Pippin	
Anna Pollard	Anganette Meneely	
Sally Davidson		

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MAY 1 1997

Federal  
Office of  
Universal Service

April 2, 1997

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Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St. NW, Room 832  
Washington, D.C., 20054

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Thank You,

Undersigned Faculty and Staff Members

Holt Elementary  
(Name of school)

Davis County School District, Utah

DeAnn Johnson  
Kathleen Andrews  
Julie Duke  
Kristen Cawley  
Dwight B. Stutch  
Jennifer Votava  
Arvela Dent  
Sanna Jorgensen  
Amanda Joutt  
J. Sweet  
Jeri Rigley  
Carolyn Marston  
Guth Thorne

Marilyn Hamblin  
Louella Hall  
Sandis Faber  
Lisa Shumway  
Gachie Taylor  
Lynnette Ferrell  
Crystal Mills  
Cheryl Bryner  
Paula Hedgerwood  
Melody Little  
Susan Colledge  
Allan Downs  
Jeanne Leiby



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

APR 28 1997

The Honorable Reed E. Hundt  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

RECORDED

MAY 1 1997

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service  
CC Docket No. 96-45, Rural Health Care

Dear Chairman Hundt:

On October 10, 1996, the Secretaries of Education, Commerce, and Agriculture wrote you supporting a strong application of the mandate set forth in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 with respect to providing discounts for all schools (K-12) and libraries in the country. On November 7, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service that you have chaired issued a robust recommendation on this issue, and we the undersigned urge you to continue supporting the import and magnitude of that recommendation. We now seek to provide input to you on another crucial issue relating to universal service, namely, that of telehealth.

In our capacities as Secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Health and Human Services, we strongly support the national goal of assuring that all Americans -- regardless of their geographic location -- have access to the advanced telecommunications necessary for the provision of essential health care services. We are deeply concerned that those living in rural communities will be left behind because the enabling electronic access for telehealth is unavailable or unaffordable.

As you know, in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress mandated the FCC to bring down the cost of rural telehealth services. The Act requires that telecommunications rates for public and non-profit rural health care providers, including local health departments or agencies, be comparable to rates charged to urban providers. We heartily endorse a meaningful and timely implementation of that provision.

There has been some recent discussion about the treatment of distance charges and access to the Internet in the realm of telehealth applications. We would like to provide our views on these issues.

First, the widespread existence of distance charges places rural health care providers at a decided disadvantage relative to their urban counterparts. Many less urbanized areas are characterized by long "local loops" or substantial circuit mileage between central offices. In studies performed by the USDA's Rural Utilities Service and the unaffiliated National Exchange Carrier Association, the average yearly rural circuit cost for 1.544 Mbps (e.g., T-1 or DS1) capability was at least triple that in urban locales. HHS's Office of Rural Health Policy has found even larger differentials: its telemedicine grantee in Billings, Montana, paid \$216 per month for a T-1 line in 1996 within the city as compared to \$922 per month for T-1 service to Sidney, Montana, 121 miles away -- a ratio of 1 to 4.3. We believe the distance-sensitive elements should be eliminated in order to meet the "reasonably comparable" standard set forth in Section 254(h)(1) of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

Second, the same kind of payment inequities exist with respect to Internet access. Many recognize the tremendous potential benefits that can be obtained by those who have access to the Internet. In its proposed implementation of the Act's universal service provisions, the Joint Board recommended that both schools and libraries receive special discounts with respect to Internet access. Concerning applications to telehealth, the Joint Board pointed out the Internet's many potential uses in retrieving important and relevant data and health information, such as the government's new website ([www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)). It is also an alternative means of conferencing. Notably, unequal access currently exists based on location: urban health care providers typically do not have to pay long distance rates or per-minute charges to connect to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), while rural users frequently do. Moreover, NTIA's informal survey of Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP) grantees that have rural telemedicine networks found that those who did not have to pay a long distance toll charge to an ISP were more likely to have Internet access. For all of these reasons, eligible rural health care providers should be exempted from these long distance and per-minute charges.

It is not hyperbole to view the Commission's mandate as one of landmark importance, and we are impressed with the earnest hard work of the Joint Board and the Commission thus far in this proceeding. We also note with appreciation the work of the FCC's Advisory Committee on Telecommunications and Health Care with

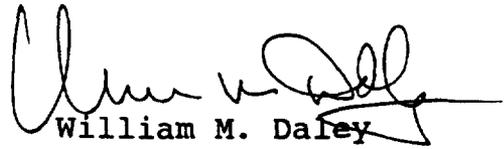
Page 3 - The Honorable Reed E. Hundt

respect to telehealth issues. As the Commission completes its deliberations on these matters, we urge you and your fellow Commissioners to adopt our recommendations as consistent with the Act and the public interest.

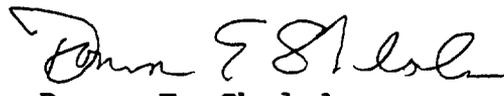
Sincerely,



Daniel R. Glickman  
Secretary of Agriculture



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cc: Commissioner Rachelle B. Chong  
Commissioner Susan Ness  
Commissioner James H. Quello



**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

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Bob Rowe, Commissioner  
District 5

April 18, 1997

Hon. Reed Hundt  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M. Street, NW  
Washington DC 20554

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Re: Ex parte comments in CC. Docket No. 96-45

Dear Chairman Hundt:

These ex parte comments are submitted only for myself. I do not write on behalf of the Montana Public Service Commission. These comments briefly address the substance of key decisions before the Federal Communications Commission. They also address the procedure for making future decisions, emphasizing the role of the Federal-State Joint Boards as the focus for federal-state cooperation.

Substantively, all actions should be taken in a manner which both promotes competition and protects customers. The FCC should shape the transition to competition so that consumers will be able to benefit from competition and are not adversely affected by changes occurring as a result of the 1996 Act.

Procedurally, the Universal Service and Separations Joint Boards are the primary methods for continued federal and state cooperation on Telecommunications Act implementation, supplemented by other formal and informal means. These two positions underlie all of the following statements.

- A. Section 254(a)(2) requires the Commission to complete a proceeding implementing the Universal Service Joint Board recommendations by May 8, 1997, which proceeding includes a definition of services supported and a specific timetable for implementation, and further requires the FCC to complete implementation proceedings on future universal service Joint Board recommendations within one year. The FCC should establish a specific implementation plan to move the telephone industry to the world of competition envisioned by the 1996 Telecommunications Act. The implementation plan should:

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**Hon Reed Hundt**

**April 18, 1992**

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1. Promptly implement those actions which are required or necessary, and clearly set out a schedule for addressing and resolving any items not finalized.
  2. Address the relationship between universal service and other topics, including access reform, separations, and examining treatment of historic costs.
  3. Determine a basis for measuring large company costs, and specifically address large high cost study areas, consistent with 47 U.S.C. 254(b)(5), which requires that those in rural, insular, and high cost areas have access to telecommunications and information services at rates that are reasonably comparable to rates charged for similar services in urban areas.
  4. Protect customers from excessive rate increases.
  5. Provide industry participants sufficient information to continue their own business plans.
- B. Responsibility for creating, sizing and defining sources of funding for a permanent high cost support mechanism is shared jointly by the FCC and state commissions.
1. Each of the proxy models filed in the proceeding has flaws that prevent its use as part of the mechanism for defining and sizing universal service high cost support. State and federal regulators should work together to craft a mechanism for defining and sizing universal service high cost support that meets the goals of Section 254.
  2. Specifically, the Federal-State Joint Board should be reconvened to develop an appropriate proxy model or other costing methods; monitor subscribership and other issues concerning low income customers; consider effects on service quality; and other matters as may be necessary.
- C. The FCC should maintain support for small and rural incumbent LECs and their customers during this transition period, as outlined in the State Joint Board Members' Report on the Use of Proxy Models (March 26, 1997).
- D. The FCC should implement a program for schools and libraries generally consistent with the Joint Board's recommendation, with any appropriate modifications based upon comments received.

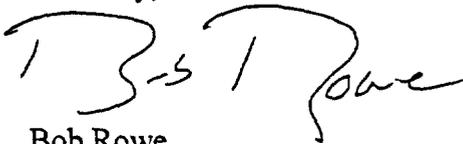
Hon Reed Hundt  
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- E. The FCC should implement a low income program, as outlined in the Report of the State Joint Board Members on Low-Income Services (March 24, 1997).
- F. Federal and state regulators should coordinate universal service implementation and other actions to ensure appropriate cost recovery and avoid over-recovery of costs.
- G. End-user surcharges are generally not a desirable way to recover costs, as stated in the State Joint Board Members' Report on Universal Service - Comments on Recovery Mechanism for Universal Service Contributions (April 8, 1997).
- H. Universal service and access reform are two of several closely-related topics. To the extent the two proceedings are successfully coordinated, short-term pressure on the High Cost Fund may be reduced. Both subjects must be addressed systematically over the longer-term.

I am aware of and appreciate your efforts to inform and work with the Congress, state public utility commissions, industry and consumer groups. I appreciate the FCC's hard work in this important area. I look forward to working with you and the FCC on these and other matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "B" and "R".

Bob Rowe



# The American Telemedicine Association

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The Honorable Reed Hundt  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20554

re: CC Docket No. 96-45  
Ex Parte Communications

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the American Telemedicine Association I want to provide these additional comments on the pending decision by the Federal Communications Commission implementing elements of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 regarding access by rural health institutions to advanced communications.<sup>1</sup> These comments further clarify our earlier filings in this matter in three specific areas.<sup>2</sup>

### Distance Charges

Congress declared that federal universal service support mechanisms should be used to help ensure that residents of rural areas receive adequate health services. The Act calls for advanced telecommunications access at rates comparable to urban areas. Providing access to high speed telecommunications lines, (1.544Mbs or higher), for rural health providers at rates that are comparable to urban areas requires the Commission to recognize and act on the rural distance penalty. Individuals and businesses in rural areas consistently pay more for many goods and services simply because they are located away from urban centers. The primary reason why high speed telecommunications lines are either not available or available at very high rates is the higher costs that accompany building the infrastructure out to more remote locations.

<sup>1</sup> Telecommunications Act of 1996, Sec. 254 (h)1(A)

<sup>2</sup> Comments Of ATA On The Notice Of Proposed Rulemaking And Order Establishing Joint Board, October 1996; And Comments Of ATA On The Recommended Universal Service Decision By The Joint Board, December 1996.

We strongly believe that the Commission must include provisions offsetting this distance penalty through eliminating distance-based charges for accessing telecommunications for eligible rural health providers. Establishing "reasonably comparable rates," as stated in the Act, requires the Commission to establish a mechanism to make these services available at rates that are distance insensitive. Allowing carriers to charge distance rates to eligible health providers would negate the intent of Congress and would continue to make access to health services unattainable for rural America.

### Access to the Internet

In both our earlier filings we made the case that rural health care providers should receive toll-free internet access. Although we believe that this issue will gradually disappear as local access to the internet continues to expand, it is still a problem in many remote areas of this country. Many residents in rural areas must pay a premium for accessing the internet through either paying long-distance toll charges or paying a premium for accessing a toll-free 800 number.

Today, access to the internet is becoming an integral part of providing quality health care. Information provided through the National Library of Medicine and other parts of the National Institutes of Health is available via the internet and provides the latest in clinical procedures, drug interactions and new medical techniques. For public health purposes, it is critical that health care workers have instant access to databases related to disease and other emerging public health concerns.

Internet access also enables physicians to share a patient's medical information and images with consulting physicians located in other areas. The lack of existing access to consulting colleagues contributes to professional isolation by rural health care workers. This professional isolation also is a key factor in both the recruitment and retention of health care workers for isolated areas.

All of the benefits of the information age will be unavailable to many rural health providers if they are required to pay higher fees for simply accessing the internet. Rural health providers have considerably fewer resources available to pay these additional fees. This creates still another barrier to quality health care for all Americans and is contrary to long-established national policy to improve medical services in remote and underserved areas.

We suggest that the Commission establish a mechanism whereby eligible rural health providers would be provided a credit through their local telephone service provider for accessing the internet. The amount of the credit would be capped, based on a formula using a predetermined number of hours of internet access (we would suggest approximately 30 hours per month) and the prevailing cost of accessing a toll-free phone service providing internet access. The recipient of the credit (a rural health provider)