

SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER KATHLEEN Q. ABERNATHY

Re: Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, CC Docket No. 98-146, Fourth Notice of Inquiry (adopted Mar. 11, 2004).

I am pleased that the Commission is initiating this fourth inquiry on the deployment of broadband infrastructure. As I have often stated, this Commission has no higher priority than facilitating the deployment of broadband networks. In the past few years, we have taken important strides in furtherance of this goal. And we are seeing concrete results, as broadband build-out continues at a rapid pace and subscription rates continue their brisk ascent. In the wireline sector, for example, our decision to refrain from mandating the unbundling of broadband loops is helping spur increased investment in fiber networks. Our preservation of a pro-investment framework for cable broadband has been another success story. Our efforts in the wireless arena also have been significant. In particular, our identification of additional spectrum for 3G applications and Wi-Fi, our promotion of flexible uses of spectrum in existing bands, and our development of secondary markets to facilitate spectrum leasing will help deliver broadband services to more Americans. Moreover, our improvements to the satellite licensing process and our efforts to promote nascent technologies such as ultra wideband and broadband over powerline will further this core statutory objective.

This inquiry regarding the timeliness of broadband deployment will help identify whether there are further steps we can take. In particular, we need to assess the extent to which rural areas are benefiting from broadband deployment and what actions would further accelerate investment. I am pleased that we are seeking comment on whether other areas and groups, such as tribal lands and persons with disabilities, are underserved. I also support our focus on ways to improve our data collection so that we can perform a more refined analysis. At the same time, we will need to weigh the benefits of obtaining more granular data against potential regulatory burdens imposed on the entities that file the reports. I look forward to examining the record in this proceeding and working with my colleagues on ways to remove any remaining barriers to broadband deployment.