

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI ON
CONNECTING THE AMERICAN CLASSROOM:
A STUDENT-CENTERED E-RATE PROGRAM**

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Many of us went to school a long time ago. Some of us were educated in an era when an apple on the teacher's desk was far more likely to be a fruit than a computer. For others, if there were computers, they were clunky machines, more suited to playing a game of Oregon Trail than teaching a lesson. Within a single generation, all that has changed. Thanks to the Internet, the wealth of civilization is at our fingertips, ready to be accessed on a tablet or smartphone.

And yet, despite this technological revolution, some of our schools seem frozen in time. Today, too many children in the United States step off the school bus, only to walk decades into the past.

This is unacceptable. I'm a father myself. My son Alexander is not yet two years old, but he already knows how to swipe through photos on my iPad. When Alexander goes to school, I want his education to be as advanced as the world in which we live, and I want him to benefit from the latest technological innovations. I'm sure that most parents feel the same way.

By grade school, for example, parents expect their children to be familiar with our solar system and the concept of planets and space. In a connected classroom, children can watch videos of the Mars Rover on YouTube or a live stream of our astronauts on the International Space Station.

By middle school, parents expect their children to be familiar with biology. In a connected classroom, kids can pull up diagrams of a cell or watch videos of mitosis in action on educational websites like neoK12. They can learn better by seeing how things work.

By high school, parents expect their children to be preparing for college or the job market. In a connected classroom, students can take vocational classes online with Kaplan or ITT Tech. With Khan Academy, Coursera, and a growing body of online courses, students can take Advanced Placement and even college-level classes that are not offered in their own schools.

Using technology to bring learning to life for children isn't new. When I was in elementary school, for example, we used to watch a lot of filmstrips. And I still remember doing research on microfiche in high school! But Internet access provides a quicker and easier way for teachers to introduce students to an amazing array of materials. That means children in rural America can take advantage of many of the same educational resources as those in urban America. Connectivity can also help equalize the opportunities provided to students in low-income areas. And children with special needs can have more of the customized education that digital technology helps make possible.

Now, don't get me wrong. Technology isn't a panacea for all of the ills affecting our educational system. The Internet doesn't supplant the need for a quality teacher in every classroom. A tablet is no substitute for parental involvement. But the bottom line is this: Parents are right to expect that schools will help prepare their children for the America of tomorrow, and they know that can't happen in a classroom of yesterday.

I.

Let's begin with the good news. Congress has already established a program to connect classrooms to the Internet with the promise of bringing digital learning to every child in America. It's technically called the Schools and Libraries program, but it's better known as E-Rate. E-Rate is a key component of the Universal Service Fund, which was created in 1997 and is administered by the FCC. Through this program, the FCC disburses about two billion dollars each year to help schools and libraries connect.

E-Rate's structure appears simple enough. Schools and libraries purchase communications services at a discount from service providers. E-Rate then compensates those service providers for the amount of the discount. Poor schools and rural schools get larger discounts than their wealthier, more urban counterparts. And when there isn't enough funding to satisfy all requests, the program has specific rules to prioritize funding.

In many ways, E-Rate has been a success. Within the first decade of its existence, for example, public-school classrooms with some form of Internet access jumped from 27 percent to 94 percent. Similarly, in 1996, three-quarters of all public schools accessing the Internet did so over a dial-up modem; ten years later, the vast majority (97 percent) used broadband.

But, like every other federal program, E-Rate isn't perfect. As happens so often when we design programs intended to help kids, we have gotten buried in the details and lost sight of the ultimate goal. Instead of a student-centered E-Rate program, we now have one too heavily focused on bureaucracy. There are five aspects to this structural problem I'd like to discuss: (1) delay, (2) paperwork, (3) the need to outsource work to consultants, (4) misplaced funding priorities, and (5) bad incentives.

First, delay. Here are the facts. The E-Rate filing process can take months. The commitment process, by which the E-Rate administrator decides how to distribute E-Rate funding, can take years. And the process for appealing those decisions can take over a decade. Take a look at the backlog for funding commitments, which goes back to 2010, or if you have the stomach for it, take a look at the backlog for appeals, which goes back to 2003. By the time a school receives its full disbursement for a given year, the students whom that money was intended to help may have already graduated.

Second, paperwork. Every American can appreciate the drudgery of filling out forms, but the E-Rate process is *so* complicated that it can deter schools from participating in the first place. For you can't just submit a simple application and wait to receive your money. Instead, school administrators have to scour the FCC's rulebooks to determine what discount they qualify for, what particular services get that discount, and when the next form is due in the lockstep E-Rate process. This bureaucracy can be enough to make some schools give up, especially small and rural schools.

For those schools that do take the plunge, an application for E-Rate funds can take a year to complete, and involves at least three forms. That's twenty-four pages of forms to fill out. At a minimum. And that's just to get funds to run cables to the school. If you want classrooms to be connected too, then you need a technology plan. A technology-plan approver will need to certify that your plan follows a set of specific requirements. If you need to adjust the dates when you'll need service, that adds another three pages. If you inadvertently wrote down the wrong service provider identification number, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that you can file an appeal to correct the error. The bad news is that the line at the proverbial courthouse stretches back a decade, so you shouldn't hold your breath.

Most schools don't have the time, personnel, or expertise to run this gauntlet on their own. This leads to the third aspect of the structural problem with E-Rate: outsourcing. The system is so complex that hiring an E-Rate consultant is often the only way to get funding. Just like tax preparation, E-Rate consulting is one artifact of an overly complicated system. Our rules aren't easy to parse, and they're prone to gaming. Hence today's cottage industry of E-Rate consulting. For society as a whole, that's wasted money—parents want funding to be spent on the classroom, not on consultants.

Even when consultants are involved, schools can make inadvertent mistakes. Those mistakes result in administrative delays, which cause what I'll call the red-tape funding gap. Each year, Americans contribute about \$2.25 billion to the Universal Service Fund for the E-Rate program. But the E-Rate program has only disbursed an average of about \$1.83 billion in each of the last ten years. That's \$400 million each year that's been collected and doesn't go out the door because of missed deadlines and bureaucratic missteps. And that number is growing; the red-tape funding gap was \$545 million in 2005 and \$872 million in 2010. As a result, there's currently over \$5 billion in the E-Rate account. Those are

funds that have already been collected from the American people and have been sitting there for months and in some cases years, waiting to be devoted to a good cause.

Now, to put a different spin on an old Elvis tune, some might be willing to tolerate a little more bureaucratic conversation for a lot more technological action. But that depends on having the right focus. And so we come to the fourth aspect of the structural problem with E-Rate: misplaced and outdated priorities. Put simply, the current program doesn't always target the right kind of services for the 21st century. And it doesn't always target the schools most in need.

Let's start with services. A program advertised as a means of advancing digital learning should prioritize connecting each classroom to the Internet. But that's not the way it is. In fact, E-Rate today prioritizes long-distance telephone calls and getting phone service to a school's bus garage over wiring up a classroom. Millions of dollars are spent on paging services, long-distance calling, toll-free numbers, and other services that aren't about connecting kids to digital learning opportunities.

How can this be? How can it be that E-Rate in the last few years committed about \$600 million—more than one quarter of its annual budget!—to support voice telephony services while at the same time denying eight out of ten applicants funding for connecting classrooms?

It comes back to the way the FCC has administered E-Rate for almost two decades. Pretty much all schools get discounts for “priority one” services, such as telephone service and Internet access service to a school building. But only a few select schools get discounts for “priority two” services, such as connecting particular classrooms to the Internet, which in E-Rate parlance is called “internal connections and maintenance.” (I'll say more about priority two later). That means if the average school wants to pay for plain old telephone service, it'll get funding. If that school gives its administrators BlackBerries for wireless phone service, text messaging, voicemail, and data, it'll get funding. If that school upgrades the bandwidth available to non-instructional buildings such as athletic facilities and bus depots, it'll get funding. But if that same school wants to connect a classroom to the school's main Internet connection? It's on its own.

Just to be clear, I'm not saying that spending on telephone services is always wasteful. Schools need phones. And there may be benefits to each staff member having a smartphone. So even if E-Rate did not subsidize these services, schools could spend their own money on them.

But that's not what E-Rate was meant to support. Congress did not ask the FCC to subsidize school administrators' anytime minutes. Fiber to the football field is nobody's rallying cry. And for good reason. Unfortunately, the current priority system does not focus on the group that needs E-Rate the most. That's something the FCC can control, *who* the money is spent on. And the answer is obvious: E-Rate should be for the students.

And not just any students, by the way. Remember, the E-Rate program was specifically designed to target poor schools and rural schools, those that the digital revolution is most likely to leave behind. But there's little correlation between how poor or rural a state is and the E-Rate funding it gets. For example, South Dakota has a much lower median household income, a much higher poverty rate, and a substantially more rural population than New Jersey. So you might think that the Mount Rushmore state would receive more E-Rate funding per student than the Garden State. To the contrary: In 2011, South Dakota received 30% less in E-Rate funding per student than New Jersey did. Indeed, funding over the last few years reveals that schools in *38 states* received less money than was justified by their rural population and poverty rates.

These strange disbursement patterns can also pop up within a state. Lakewood, New Jersey, is a town of about 92,000 people. In 2011, it received \$282 in E-Rate funding for every student served. Fifty miles north is Newark, New Jersey—a town so poor the mayor volunteers as a fireman! Newark received less than a third of Lakewood's per-pupil figure, just \$82, even though Newark residents make less money on average than Lakewood residents do.

Moreover, consider the problem of funding for priority two services, such as internal connections—that is, linking individual classrooms to the Internet. Typically, only the applicants with the highest discounts get any priority two funding. A decade ago, the FCC recognized that the same relatively small group of schools (and only those schools) were receiving priority two funding year after year. It made a few tweaks in response, including the so-called two-in-five rule. Yet, a decade later, we're back where we started. The same schools keep getting funded at every other school's expense. Last September, I visited high schools in Oswego and Parsons, Kansas. Oswego has fewer than 2,000 people; Parsons has about 11,000. Having grown up in Parsons, I can personally attest to how rural it is. And yet, neither my alma mater, Parsons High School, nor Oswego High School could get funding for internal connections.

Put simply, the distribution of E-Rate funds is haphazard and doesn't fulfill the promise of the program. Dollars are directed not where they are most needed (rural and poor schools) but where people are most adept at navigating the system.

The fifth and final problem with the structure of the E-Rate program is that it gives participants the wrong incentives. E-Rate doesn't require all schools to have real skin in the game. E-Rate discounts for some schools can be 90 percent, meaning those schools get nine federal dollars for every dollar they spend. With little incentive to control the costs of the services they purchase, it's not surprising that heavily subsidized schools request not just more E-Rate funds per student than others but disproportionately more. By one estimate, schools that get 90 percent discounts requested *twice as much* E-Rate funding per student in 2012 as was spent by schools qualifying for no more than a 79-percent discount. And that's just for priority one services like telecommunications and Internet access services. When it comes to priority two services like connecting classrooms, the schools with the highest discounts get the vast majority of available funds.

Unfortunately, these incentives can lead a school district to make irresponsible decisions. Take the Atlanta public school system. That system used \$73 million in E-Rate funding to create a lavish computer network that included laying miles of fiber between schools. The project was a series of missteps, to put it charitably. A few schools got expensive installations just before shutting down. And at least \$2 million was spent on the beginning of a wireless network before a decision was made to abandon that project. Even after all this E-Rate funding, three quarters of Atlanta Public Schools' students had less than an hour per day of computer use. On top of all that, the network costs \$14 million per year to maintain, three times the district's budget for textbooks.

Atlanta isn't an isolated case. Back in 2004, Chicago had tens of millions of dollars in E-Rate funding coming its way to connect schools to the Internet. When the system fell two years behind schedule, Chicago schools decided to spend the money on \$8 million in computer-related equipment so that it wouldn't lose the money—and that equipment then had no place to go but storage, where it sat for years.

Working the system isn't just limited to schools. It also applies to service providers. Some businesses inflate the price of services eligible for funding but also throw in ineligible services for free—all in order to increase the bill paid by Uncle Sam. Others use contract requirements to lock in schools while they inflate the price. In Ysleta, Texas, one vendor apparently used "sole source" requirements for an \$18 million E-Rate project. The company justified the contract as part of their consulting, which helped school districts stay on time in filing paperwork and completing projects, while glossing over the inflated costs that resulted.

In sum, the very structure of the E-Rate program—the time it takes to get funding, the paperwork you have to fill out, the consultants you have to hire, the misplaced funding priorities we've set, the poor incentives we've given—is not designed to meet the core mission Congress gave us of providing students with "access to advanced . . . services."

At this point, you might ask: Even if E-Rate's current structure is flawed, hopefully E-Rate funds are being spent wisely? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. If you haven't guessed already, the E-Rate program has a waste, fraud, and abuse problem. You can Google "E-Rate scandal" if you like, but I'll go ahead and spare you the keystrokes.

One of many examples: Earlier this year began just the latest criminal trial involving E-Rate abuse and the Houston Independent School District. Deep in what is now Dwight Howard country, a consultant hired and paid Houston school employees to work on a variety of projects, all contingent on the consultant successfully winning E-Rate-funded contracts—because, of course, all the funds to pay these employees came out of the E-Rate program. The consultant allegedly offered more than \$60,000 in loans to decision-makers in the district and entertained them in luxury suites at sporting events and with tickets to the Super Bowl. His business partner, meanwhile, has already been convicted of bribery—in part for taking one school employee to Las Vegas three separate times.

And then there's the school in Brooklyn that has received tens of millions of E-Rate dollars over the years. In 2012, just one of the school's service providers billed the program \$81,600 for Internet access alone. This is all rather curious because the school's students are explicitly forbidden from accessing the Internet.

These stories aren't unique. Puerto Rico received more than \$100 million in federal subsidies from 1998 through 2001 to wire 1,500 schools. Only nine schools got connected—*nine*—and auditors found \$23 million in equipment that had never been used. The unopened equipment may fit nicely in a government warehouse with the Ark of the Covenant, but it would have done more good for students if it had found its way into the classroom. Auditors also found \$3 million being spent monthly on Internet connections *to schools with no PCs*. Just think about that.

Of course, every federal program that distributes a large amount of money is susceptible to abuse. But E-Rate, as the FCC has structured it, almost invites it. One reason is the method of distribution. As I mentioned earlier, E-Rate pays up to 90 percent of the cost of service with no limits and no caps. That means the more you spend, the more you get. With almost unlimited potential funds, there's not enough of an incentive for recipients to manage funds wisely.

This begs the question of the cop on the beat. Is the FCC doing adequate oversight of the E-Rate program? Unfortunately, the lack of transparency makes it hard for us to do so. Three years ago, the National Broadband Plan called out the FCC for not knowing "the different types or capacities of broadband services that are supported through the E-Rate program." To be sure, we know the broad brushstrokes—say, whether funds were spent on telecommunications services or basic maintenance—but we don't know the specifics of how the money is being used.

A lack of transparency also makes local accountability difficult, if not impossible. Local newspapers can't ferret out whether funding is going to BlackBerries for administrators or connecting kids without invoking the Freedom of Information Act. Parents, who expect their kids will benefit from E-Rate funding, can't hold their schools responsible for how they spend their E-Rate money. And short of a formal investigation, state and local governments too aren't able to get meaningful insight into E-Rate spending, even if they want to.

These are the problems with today's E-Rate program as I see it. I point them out not because E-Rate isn't valuable but rather because it is. At its core, E-Rate is a program worth fighting for. As Senator Rockefeller put it to me a few months ago, we need to "updat[e] the program to meet the present and future needs of our schools and libraries." Indeed. I too believe that E-Rate needs to be reinvigorated, revitalized, and revamped. We need to streamline the process. We need to reduce the paperwork. We need to make it easier for schools to obtain funding without outside help. We need to end the incentives for wasteful spending. We need to distribute funds more fairly. And we need greater transparency. In sum, we need a student-centered E-Rate program.

II.

How do we get there? *First*, I propose that we start by allocating the E-Rate budget across every school in America so that every school board and every parent knows up front, on day one, how much E-Rate funding is available. Because we want a student-centered E-Rate program, we should divvy up the money on a per-student basis and let the money follow the students when they change schools. Because we still want to account for the higher costs at rural schools and the difficult circumstances faced by schools serving poor areas, we should devote additional funds for rural students and for poor students.

Here's an example of how this would work. Let's say E-Rate has set aside \$2.1 billion for schools, which translates into about \$42 in support for each student. If rural students were to get double the support of urban students and poor students were to get double the support of wealthier students, a student attending a school in rural West Virginia might bring in \$128 whereas a student in a tony part of New York might only bring in \$32. So if a poor, rural school has 400 students, it will know before the school year even begins that it has about \$50,000 in E-Rate funds coming its way.

Second, I propose that we redirect spending away from outdated services and toward next-generation technologies that directly benefit students. That means funding broadband, not stand-alone telephone service, toll-free service, or cellphone service. And that means funding classrooms and learning centers instead of non-instructional buildings like garages and athletic facilities. Again, I'm not saying that the latter spending has no value, but it should be up to states and localities to use their own money for those purposes. E-Rate is not a block grant program. It is a federal program. And the federal government has the right to insist—and in my reading of the law, *has* insisted—that spending be focused on students.

But redirecting support doesn't mean micromanaging. Just the opposite. With a student-centered allocation of funds, we can flatten the list of services eligible for E-Rate funding. No more priority one and priority two services. Let schools decide how to spend those funds on services listed on one consolidated, technology-neutral menu. Different schools face different circumstances, so letting each choose where to spend E-Rate funds—faster broadband, connecting more classrooms, or more wireless hotspots—will stretch limited dollars and will have the biggest impact on students.

Third, I propose that we vastly simplify the E-Rate application process. It doesn't need to be as painful, as complicated, or as drawn out as it currently is. To be sure, schools will need to certify the number of students they have and report back on how they spend the money. But that requires filling out only two forms. In fact, the initial application should be no more than one page. No need for complex discount calculations—the administrator can do it using census data. In short, less red tape, fewer delays, and more predictability.

Fourth, I propose to add real accountability and transparency to the E-Rate process. On the front end, all schools should put down at least one dollar for every three E-Rate dollars they get. That's a straightforward matching requirement which is in line with the Commission's recent, bipartisan reforms of the rural Healthcare Connect Fund. And a high-ranking school official, like a district superintendent or principal, will be required to certify that E-Rate funds will be used to benefit students. On the back end, schools and service providers should disclose more clearly and in detail exactly what students are getting with federal funds. All of this information should be collected and made available on a single website, one which allows any American to see with specificity how any school in the nation has spent its E-Rate funds.

That's my four-step proposal for a student-centered E-Rate program. And, having surveyed sixteen years of data and history, I believe that several factors make this new approach simpler, more efficient, fairer, and more transparent than the system we have now.

For one thing, a student-centered E-Rate program replaces today's complexities with simplicity. That will make it easier to participate in the program, which means more schools will apply. And that

will enable schools to complete their E-Rate application themselves, instead of hiring outside help. Money that now goes to consultants would go to students instead.

For another, a student-centered E-Rate program focuses on the needs of children. Eliminating support for stand-alone telephone service means more funding for next-generation infrastructure and technologies that will directly help students learn. Without a priority system that discourages spending money on internal connections, schools will have more flexibility. They could now bring more bandwidth to classrooms. Or they could prioritize infrastructure one year and greater bandwidth the next to meet their students' needs. They will be empowered to make decisions. And that's the way it should be, because they know the particular needs of a local school better than Washington does.

For yet another, this proposal would promote more careful spending. With a steady stream of funding for all schools, schools can better plan for the future. And with a fixed pot of money and a three-to-one match, schools will be more prudent about how they spend E-Rate funds than they are now.

For still yet another, a student-centered E-Rate program creates a fairer distribution of E-Rate funds by tying the money to the student. By targeting rural students and poor students directly, rather than through an indirect discount matrix, the proposal ensures that money flows to the students and not to those better able to work the system. And it would guarantee that funds will be available for *every* student. Schools with more students would get more money, as would rural and low-income kids. In the end, everyone would get his or her fair share.

Finally, a student-centered E-Rate program favors sunshine and transparency as the primary means of safeguarding federal funds. That's not to say that federal oversight should go away, of course—it cannot and should not. But as former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis put it exactly one century ago, “sunlight is . . . the best of disinfectants.”

So too here. For there is a simple truth: We can't clean up every mess on our own. The Universal Service Fund's administrator will never be able to hire enough staff to weed out every single instance of waste, fraud, and abuse in the tens of thousands of schools across the country that participate in the E-Rate program each year. That's why we need to enlist a new army of recruits to join their ranks: school board members, parents, journalists, and government watchdogs. My proposal requires an easily accessible online resource so that the public can see in detail how much E-Rate funding is available to a school and how each school is spending its E-Rate funds. If a school board needs to know how administrators are spending public funds, it could easily find out. If a journalist suspects abuse, he can easily investigate and verify if the actual spending of funds matches the reporting. If a parent is unhappy about a school's choices, she'll have the knowledge to complain effectively. With transparent decisions, the whole community can be involved in effective oversight. That's a lot better than relying solely on a small team of auditors based out of Washington, valiant though their efforts are.

The certification requirement too will help reduce waste. If the publicly available data shows that funds were not spent for the benefit of students, accountability will be direct and immediate. This will give administrators more motivation to ensure that money is used to help kids.

Now, there are sure to be some who will be skeptical of a student-centered E-Rate program. Consultants may fear lost business if the paperwork and the labyrinth of rules disappear. Those who have figured out how to game the system may complain about their lost support. But as an FCC Commissioner, my job is simple: to follow the law and to focus on how to best serve our nation's students.

Many will likely ask how a student-centered E-Rate program fits with President Obama's ConnectED initiative, which has proposed specific bandwidth goals for schools over the next few years. To be clear, I'm not opposed to goals. It's generally good to have them. But we also need to understand that different communities have different needs. To me, this means we shouldn't force schools to skew their spending decisions in order to help us meet an arbitrary national target. Indeed, a 2010 FCC survey

showed that 22 percent of respondents were “completely” satisfied and another 58 percent were “mostly” satisfied with the bandwidth they’re getting. So if a school wants to spend money connecting *all* of its classrooms to the Internet rather than ensuring that one particular classroom has a 1 Gbps connection, it should be able to make that investment. Faced with the choice between a one-dimensional national benchmark or local autonomy that benefits local students, I favor the latter.

Others may argue that funding, or rather an alleged lack of funding, is the main problem with today’s E-Rate program. If you just bake a bigger pie, the argument goes, you don’t need to worry so much about what goes in the filling. But for Commissioner Pai, now is not the time to take that step. Instead, the FCC, like the rest of government, should prioritize fiscal responsibility. By reducing waste, eliminating misguided incentives, and distributing funds more fairly, we can accomplish more—probably a lot more—with the same amount of money. Clearing out the decade’s worth of backlogged appeals and eliminating the red-tape funding gap, two vestiges of the current system, should be the next step. That could free up additional billions of dollars for schools, without collecting an extra dime. In fact, in just its first year of implementation, my plan would provide over \$1 billion in additional funding for next-generation technology without any increase in the program’s budget.

And if we decide at some point to increase the program’s budget, we should do so only if we can find corresponding savings elsewhere in the Universal Service Fund. Over the last four years, the universal service contribution factor has increased from 9.5% to 15.1%—that’s nearly a 60 percent increase. We cannot ask Americans to pay even more in their monthly phone bills, especially when median household income in this country has now fallen for four straight years.

One more thing: The E-Rate program isn’t just about schools. It’s also about libraries, which depend on E-Rate funds to connect patrons to job sites and educational resources around the globe. I’ve been a fan of libraries since my childhood. When you’re growing up in a small town—say, Parsons, Kansas—your local library can be a connection to the whole world, a chance to read about places and things you may never get to see. And today, libraries are even more important because they have become a mainstay for Americans who can’t get broadband at home. Libraries receive about ten percent of E-Rate funds now, and they are subject to the same tortuous process as schools to receive that funding. Going forward, I want to maintain the allocation of E-Rate funds for libraries and to streamline the applications process. But that discussion, while critical, is best left for another day.

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This afternoon, I’ve talked about *how* we can improve the E-Rate program. But I’d like to end with *why* it’s important we do so. E-Rate’s purpose looks dry on the page; Congress said it intended for schools and libraries to “have affordable access to modern telecommunications services that will enable them to provide . . . educational services to all parts of the Nation.” But that purpose has a real and emotional resonance to virtually every mother and father. Parents want their children to have a better learning environment than they had, largely because they want their children to have a better life than they’ve had. So parents want the connected classroom to better prepare students for the world of tomorrow.

There are and will be challenges as the FCC seeks to improve the E-Rate program. But those challenges are worth confronting, and now is the time to confront them. When summer vacation ends and America’s children start school in the fall of 2014, let’s commit ourselves to welcoming them back with an improved E-Rate program. Meeting that deadline will require the FCC to carefully but promptly review the record. And building a solid record, in turn, will require your input. I encourage you to offer your suggestions about my proposals—what you think I get right, and what you think I could improve.

As a Commissioner and as a father, I truly believe that we can teach our children better. We have the will. We have the technology. We have the capability to bring every student in America into the digital age. As we review and revitalize this program, let’s always remember what it promised to be,

what it is, and what it could be. I look forward to working with my colleagues, educators, parents, and others to bring to life a student-centered E-Rate program.