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## ‘Leaving the House’ to Make an Impact

the people that didn’t even bother to leave the house.

In the rural telecommunications industry, it is mighty tough right now to “leave the house.” Management is struggling not only with painful technological choices for their core businesses, but also with the variety of new ventures into competitive and advanced services that have cropped up since the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

In light of the attention that must be given these endeavors, managers and directors can be forgiven for pushing legislative and regulatory matters lower on their priority list. However, we do so at our peril. Congress, the FCC, state legislatures and state public utility commissions are all taking actions that will have profound implications for the future viability of rural telephone companies.

Over the past few months, I have had a few opportunities to “leave the house.” Shortly after returning from NTCA’s Legislative Conference in April, I received a call from an aide to Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.). The communications subcommittee of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and the Indian Affairs Committee were holding a joint meeting to discuss eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) status on Indian reservations. The aide asked if I’d be willing to be a witness. I was extremely busy at the time, but I bit the bullet and agreed to go back to Washington, D.C.

When I arrived, it turned out that there were only two witnesses from the telecommunications industry—myself, and the CEO of Western Wireless, a cellular outfit that operates in the western United States. In my testimony, I discussed some of the truly remarkable things we have done on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana. Western Wireless’ CEO then delivered his testimony, which was riddled with highly dubious claims regarding the capabilities of cellular service.

For instance, he tried to assure the committees that loss

Woody Allen once said that 98% of life is just showing up. There’s great truth to that sentiment. My interpretation of that statement is this: By just being involved in something, you are miles ahead of the 98% of

of cellular power in bad weather was not an issue for rural customers, as the company has generators at its tower site. Of course, we know this does little

good for the consumer whose phone battery has died. He also blasted wireline companies and statewide associations for pressing companies seeking ETC status for details of reliability and assurances of service. I responded to his points as best I could, and I wondered how many of these hearings are taking place without anyone present from our industry to dispel such diatribes.

Shortly after coming home, I received another call. This one was from a senior policy analyst at the FCC, who was looking for a guest speaker to talk about rural telephone companies. I flew back to D.C. and spoke about the challenges and opportunities inherent in providing basic and advanced services in sparsely populated rural areas. The audience consisted of the bureau chiefs and their policy staffs -- the people who actually write the orders at the FCC. I don’t know if my speech did any good, but it couldn’t have hurt. Goodness knows they hear plenty of speeches from the “big money” companies.

My hope is that when other folks in the rural telephone industry have a chance to represent our interests, whether it is in our nation’s capital or in their state capitals, they will act on those opportunities. Your statewide and national association representatives simply cannot be everywhere at once. And the issues facing us now are too important to let slip through the cracks. In other words, don’t be part of that 98% that could have made an impact but didn’t, just because they didn’t want to “leave the house.”

*Reprinted with permission from the September/October 2002 issue of Rural Telecommunications, published by the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, an Arlington, Va.-based association representing small, rural telecommunications carriers.*



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***USTA appeals FCC ruling re Western Wireless***

On October 1, 2000, the United States Telecommunications Association (USTA) filed an appeal with the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. of the FCC's recent ruling that Western Wireless' Basic Universal Service Offering in Kansas is a commercial mobile radio service and is not subject to local exchange carrier regulation.

***FCC issues Universal Service Monitoring Report***

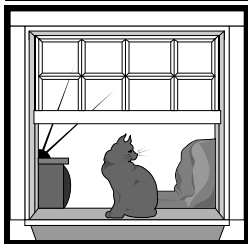
On October 9, 2002, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service released its Monitoring Report on Universal Service with information on the telephone industry filed with the FCC through April 20, 2002. Ref: [www.fcc.gov/wcb/iatd/stats.html](http://www.fcc.gov/wcb/iatd/stats.html)

***MITS Addresses NTCA Petition***

In recently filed comments, MITS agreed in principle and disagreed in practice with rules proposed by NTCA to the FCC. The rules would have clarified the meanings of "new" and "captured" telephone lines for the purpose of federal funding support. To the extent NTCA's proposed definitions would have limited support to companies truly providing high-quality basic telephone service in rural areas, MITS applauded NTCA's efforts. However, MITS also suggested that a little refinement was needed to ensure the proposed definitions did not have the unintended consequence of depriving funding to deserving providers. The comments are posted on the MITS Website at [www.mitstel.com](http://www.mitstel.com).

***Qwest fails to file rate case with PSC by Oct 1 deadline***

In their August 2002 Evaluation of Qwest's bid for Montana intraLATA long distance entry, the Public Service Commission recommended that the FCC deny Qwest's application unless certain conditions were met. One of the conditions required Qwest to file by October 1, 2002, a full revenue requirement and rate design case. Qwest failed to make the required rate filing. The PSC voted on Oct 8 to advise the FCC of Qwest's noncompliance with that condition and to recommend that the FCC deny Qwest's newly filed application. Commissioner Bob Rowe voted against the motion which passed 4-1.



**E-Rate Window Opens**

The importance of *this* window cannot be understated. Schools and libraries can obtain telecom services at a fraction of retail prices. The filing window for FY2003 E-Rate funding opens at noon

EST Nov 4, 2002 and closes at 11:59 p.m. EST Jan 16, 2003. The window is extremely important. Although the early bird may or may not get the worm, the late bird gets nothing.

Schools and libraries must file a Form 471 within the filing win-

dow indicating their choice of service providers; however, *prior* to signing and filing that form, schools and libraries must have complied with initial filing and posting requirements. Applicants must first have filed a Form 470 service application in time to wait the required 28-day posting period before executing any contracts for contracted services and before selecting service providers for tariffed or month-to-month services.

Applicants can get a head start by filing the initial Form 470 on line before the Form 471 filing window opens Nov. 4. Complete information is found at <http://www.sl.universalservice.org>.

***No New TOP Grants for MT***

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, has announced the award of \$12.4 million in Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grants to 25 non-profit organizations including state and local governments. On September 27th, 25 grants were awarded from a pool of 741 applications seeking more than \$330 million in federal dollars. No Montanans were listed in the latest TOP awards.

Successful recipients and projects were varied. For example, the Applied Informa-

tion Management Institute was awarded \$675,000 for its Nebraska CyberSeed Project to expand economic development and job creation in an agriculturally-based economy. New York's Seedco project garnered \$298,387 for its Worker's Individualized Support Tool: Using an innovative online tool to help low wage earners migrate to sustained employment. The Kalispell Tribe from Washington state will receive \$505,000 to develop broadband digital network technologies to assist Indian tribes in eastern Washington preserve and sustain their shared tribal culture, history and language.

This is the first year the TOP awards bypassed Montana. In years past, TOP grants helped the MT District Export Council at Silver Bow create a virtual e-business in-

cubator; assisted the MT Indian Technology and Cultural Heritage Learning Centers establish reservation-based tech training centers at which tribal elders worked with others to digitally preserve their tribes culture; funded the Missoula Choices Bank, a community-based repository using technology to link health care institutions for electronic repositories of health care directives such as living wills and power of attorney; helped MSU-Northern use information technology in rural distance learning programs; and assisted the Saint Vincent Foundation integrate the Telemedicine Instrumentation Pack units with terrestrial telemedicine networks linking the Crow Reservation to St. Vincent's Hospital.

Ref: <http://www.ntia.doc.gov>





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***MONTANA TELECOMMUNICATIONS***  
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United We Stand



**The Cutting Edge**      ***Next Generation Internet***

Internet Protocol (or IP) can be described as the common thread that holds the entire Internet together. It is a standardized set of rules responsible for moving data from one location to another using complex routing algorithms. Data, which could be voice, video, text, etc., is broken into chunks called packets. Each packet is "stamped" with the "address" of the receiver (as well as the sender). Routing decisions are then made on a packet-by-packet basis, meaning the packets may take different routes to get to the receiver. The packets are then reassembled at the receiving end. Of course, all this activity is usually transparent to most Internet users since it occurs nearly instantaneously.

The current Internet protocol, IP version 4 (or IPv4), has been in place for nearly twenty years and is beginning to show its

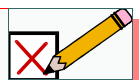
age. In particular, there is a growing shortage of IPv4 addresses, which are needed by all new devices connected to the Internet. Internet Protocol Version 6 (IPv6) is the "next generation" protocol designed to replace IPv4. In addition to fixing the problem of IP address exhaust, IPv6 also enhances other capabilities such as desktop-to-desktop video conferencing, true voice over the Internet, and other real-time applications that have historically been prone to latency and security issues.

For example, under IPv4 serious congestion problems arise because all traffic is given the same level of "importance" by the Internet. IPv6 enables certain kinds of Internet traffic to be "prioritized" to a far greater degree than IPv4 for applications like voice and streaming video, thereby improving throughput.

IPv6 also adds many improvements to IPv4 in areas such as routing and network auto-configuration. Thus, desktops and laptops can easily become a part of an existing network just by connecting them to a network jack without any additional configuration needed. IPv6 is expected to gradually replace IPv4, with the two coexisting for a number of years during a transition period.

To find out more about IPv6 and its benefits visit <http://www.ipv6forum.com>.

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