

CONGRESSIONAL RURAL CAUCUS HOLDS MEMBER FORUM ON TELECOM CHALLENGES FACING RURAL AMERICA

Terry/Boucher USF bill among proposals discussed by lawmakers, experts, industry reps

Washington – On February 15, the Congressional Rural Caucus (CRC) held the first in what will be a series of member forums to discuss the challenges rural telecommunications carriers face in providing affordable, modern services to rural customers. These issues, though always relevant, are especially topical this year as Congress prepares to re-examine the landmark Telecommunications Act of 1996.

“Access to broadband services is vital for any business that wants to compete in today’s global marketplace,” said Representative John Peterson, R-Pa., who serves as co-chairman of the Rural Caucus. “Additionally, broadband technology enables hospitals and health care providers to greatly improve patient care in rural areas, and is critical for improving our rural way of life. I look forward to working with my colleagues to improve access to affordable broadband in rural areas as we work to improve the 1996 Telecommunications Act.”

“If a community doesn’t have broadband, it’s a huge competitive disadvantage,” said Congressman Allen Boyd, D-Fla., co-chair of the CRC. “With support from USF in providing broadband services to more remote areas, schools and libraries connect our children to educational opportunities via the Internet and rural telephone companies give consumers access to telemedicine facilities where healthcare would be otherwise unavailable. As we re-examine the Telecommunications Act this year, the CRC is committed to ensuring that rural America has a voice in developing the communications laws for the new millennium.”

Joining Representative Peterson and Congressman Boyd at the forum were several other rural legislators, including CRC Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairmen Gil Gutknecht, R-Minn., and Bart Stupak, D-Mich., who chaired the forum and moderated the discussion. Rep. Randy Neugebauer, R-Texas, was also in attendance and took time to address the forum.

The first panel of witnesses to testify featured Representatives Lee Terry, R-Neb., and Rick Boucher, D-Va., who brought their legislation seeking to strengthen and protect the Universal Service Fund (USF) to the CRC for consideration and support. Using the event as forum to answer questions members had about the draft version of the bill, they also shared some thoughts on the various obstacles slowing the deployment of broadband throughout rural America, while reaffirming the need for a strong USF to be a part of the ongoing telecommunications debate in Congress.

Witnesses on the second panel included telecommunications industry officials representing organizations such as the National Exchange Carrier Association, United States Telecom Association, Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Rural Cellular Association, American Cable Association, and others. Witness testimony and other information are available at <http://www.house.gov/johnpeterson/ruralcaucus/index.htm>.

TSTCI COMMITTEE ACTION UPDATE

With all the telecommunications-related activity at both the state and federal levels, several TSTCI committees have been hard at work to protect the interests of our member companies.

The TSTCI Board of Directors and Regulatory Committee members have been participating on conference calls regarding the FCC's Intercarrier Compensation proceeding, and will participate in a meeting to determine the best course of action for TSTCI.

The TSTCI Regulatory and Accounting Committees participated in a conference call to address a request for comments from the Texas PUC filed in Project No. 28708 - Rulemaking Proceeding to Amend P.U.C. Subst. R. 26.420(F) - Assessments for the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF).

The TSTCI Regulatory Committee and TSTCI SB 5 Subcommittee have been working on responses to Texas PUC Staff questions for Project No. 31863 – Review and Evaluation of the Texas Universal Service Fund Pursuant to PURA Section 56.029.

2006 FRS COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1

If you know of a graduating high school senior who receives local telephone service from a National Telephone Cooperative Association (NTCA) member company, and is from a rural area, he or she may be eligible to apply for a \$2,500 scholarship. Applications must be postmarked by March 1, 2006.

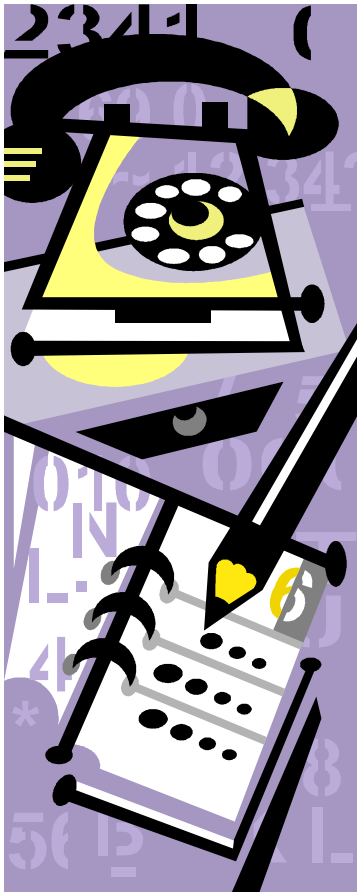
In May of 2006, FRS will award \$62,500 in the form of twenty-five, \$2,500 scholarships to rural high school seniors across the United States. Awards are granted to students sponsored by a National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) member company and, if chosen, are awarded \$2,000 by FRS in addition to a \$500 scholarship match by their sponsoring company.

You will find the scholarship application along with additional information on the Foundation for Rural Service website at http://www.frs.org/ka/ka-2.cfm?Folder_ID=397. Questions regarding the scholarship program can be directed to the Foundation at (703) 351-2026.

WRLD ALLIANCE COMMUNICATIONS ACQUIRED BY ZONE TELECOM, INC.

WRLD Alliance, a provider of long distance services to rural ILECs, announced that it is joining forces with ZONE Telecom, Inc. to offer dynamic telecom services to rural telephone companies around the country. "The combination of our companies will give our customer base an unequaled level of product choice in the telecom marketplace," said Dale Lewis, President of WRLD Alliance. "This transaction will give our customers access to a deep menu of new ZONE services, while continuing to provide the high-quality long distance service WRLD customers currently receive.

The acquisition is subject to regulatory approval as required and pending such approval, is expected to be concluded prior to the 5th Annual Winter Convention in Park City, Utah, March 27-29, 2006. For more information, visit www.zonetelecom.com.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The TSTCI Spring Managers' Conference will be here before you know it. You won't want to miss important sessions on technology, intercarrier compensation, a telco case study of IPTV, FTTH and VOD – and the South Padre Island sunshine. The conference will be held Wednesday, June 7 through Friday, June 9 at the Radisson Resort.

Watch for conference details next month by e-mail and on the TSTCI website. If you have any questions in the meantime, contact Ann Weinberg, TSTCI Director of Conferences, at ann.weinberg@chrsolutions.com.

ACE 2006 ENGINEERING SCHOOL

The Association of Communication Engineers (ACE) will be holding their bi-annual School on April 30-May 3, 2006 at the Marriott Memphis Downtown in Memphis, Tennessee. The 2006 School will be unique because it will be held jointly with the Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

The program will focus the attendees' attention upon technologies and issues that are relevant, or emerging, in the arena of telecommunications. The ACE portion of the program will address topics in the wireless, video, high-speed data (VoIP), and wireline (FTTP) areas of practice. The program format allows ample room for audience questions and participation. The School presentations are provided by ACE member employees who focus on various aspects of the topic without emphasizing vendor-specific equipment.

The RUS will be reviewing several elements of the Loan program and portions of the Broadband program. There will be an entire day of the School devoted to getting the latest information from RUS representatives.

Also, the School provides numerous opportunities for networking with telephone company leadership, engineering consultants, and RUS staff. ACE provides a few sponsorship opportunities to select vendors (usually chosen from a waiting list) that allow selected vendors to attend meetings, display products at small, tabletop booths, and speak on their products & services during the event.

It is this combination of high-quality, non-biased topical presentations, a diverse audience of attendees from government, telco company management, and the engineering consulting field that consistently makes the ACE School one of the most valuable and informative events of its kind in the industry.

If you are interested in obtaining more information for your organization regarding this event, please contact George Wyatt, Chairman, ACE School Committee at (864) 220-2544 or email gwyatt@mscon.com. Information is also available on the Association of Communications Engineers website: www.ace-engineers.com.

Employment Opportunity

Director, Cost Separations (Dallas, TX.) –

Exciting opportunity to manage cost separations department for established, full-service consulting firm. Responsible for day-to-day operation of department including client deliverables, client satisfaction, quality of service, employee development, etc. Other duties will include: developing and reviewing toll cost and USF studies; interacting with clients and representing company at industry meetings. Requirements: 8 years experience in separations, and/or accounting and finance; 3 years management experience; consulting experience preferred; proficiency with Excel spreadsheets, word processing and databases; solid understanding of FCC Parts 32/36/64/69; excellent customer service and communication skills.

Excellent benefits and pay commensurate with experience. Send resume to: resumes@chrsolutions.com or fax to (972) 241-6735. CHR Solutions is an equal opportunity employer.

MAPCOM SYSTEMS, OSMOSE UTILITIES COLLABORATE ON SOLUTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT TELCOS

Mapcom Systems and Osmose Utilities Services have entered into a co-marketing agreement designed to bring together the benefits of Mapcom Systems' GOS-based M4® Solutions with Osmose's FastGate® Mobile field data collection solution, thereby providing customers with a complete GPS-based field data collection solution powered by Osmose's software that links seamlessly with maps and data contained in Mapcom's M4 software.

"This agreement represents the ideal marriage of complementary technologies," said John Granger, President of Mapcom. "We have already received enthusiastic response from our customers as they learn of our alliance with Osmose."

For more information, visit www.mapcom.com.

Upcoming Events

March 2006

- 1-3 TSTCI Plantmen's Conference – San Antonio, Texas**
- 8 NECA Open Committee & Board Meetings – Austin, Texas *(See January TSTCI Information for info.)*
- 12-14 NTCA Telco Board Officers Conference – Scottsdale, Arizona
- 19-23 USTA TelecomNEXT – Las Vegas, Nevada
- 26-28 NTCA Telecom Executive Forum – Palm Springs, California
- 27-29 WRLD Annual Winter Convention – Park City, Utah

April 2006

- 11-14 NTCA VoIPossibilities Conference – Nashville, Tennessee
- 24-26 NTCA Legislative & Policy Conferences – Washington, DC
- 30-May 3 ACE 2006 Engineering School – Memphis, Tennessee

May 2006

- 1-2 NTCA PRNET Marketing Conference – Coral Gables, Florida
- 16-18 OPASTCO Legislative & Regulatory Conference – Washington, DC