

Already, many in my home State of South Dakota are beginning to realize the importance and value of telecommunications services. Many small, rural medical clinics and hospitals are linking together with larger, more urban hospitals via telemedicine to provide their citizens with a higher quality of care. Children in schools that are hundreds of miles from the nearest population center can now have access to the world's greatest libraries at their fingertips. An increasing number of South Dakota agricultural producers are determining weather forecasts and market reports with a simple keystroke. And all across main street South Dakota, small businesses are reducing their overhead via networking services, reducing their paper work through electronic mail, and saving thousands of dollars a year in travel expenses through their use of teleconferencing.

And all of this is just the beginning. As these technologies continue to develop, the playing field for economic development will begin to level. South Dakota is already enjoying the benefits of advanced telecommunications and they can only stand to benefit from further telecommunications reform. *Id.*, at S 709.

**Mr. Kerry:**

I am also pleased the conference report includes three amendments which I sponsored.

. . . .

The third amendment will make sure that as we build the information highway, the builders do not bypass poor rural or urban communities. When interstate highways were built through cities across our Nation, often times they went directly through poor neighborhoods. Construction of the technology interstate system must not be allowed to detour around children and families in the same or similar areas who already face enormous challenges. My amendment is designed to assure that the telecommunications network will reach every neighborhood, offering access to those who need it most for a decent education, to upgrade their job skills or to connect them to medical help they need. *Id.*, at S 710.

**Mr. Harkin:**

However, we must also recognize that telecommunications competition is limited in some areas, especially in many rural areas. The high cost of providing telecommunications to rural areas is prohibitive for most telecommunications service providers without some incentive. The

1934 communications bill understood this and adopted a principle called universal service, which was thankfully maintained and updated in S. 652.

....

Without universal service protections, advance telecommunications will blow right by rural America creating a society of information haves and have nots. S.652 recognizes that the definition of universal service is evolving as the technology changes. S. 652 requires the FCC to establish a Federal-State joint board to recommend rules to reform the universal service system. The Joint Board will base its policies on principles which understands that access to quality, advanced telecommunications services should be provided to all Americans at a reasonable cost.

....

The information super-highway must be available and affordable to all Americans through schools and libraries. *Id.*, at S 713.

**Mr. Exon:**

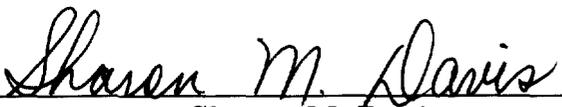
Mr. President, this legislation also represents a major victory for rural America. The conference report gives approval to the so-called farm-team provisions. These provisions assure that rural citizens enjoy telephone technologies and prices which are comparable to those in urban areas. The provisions also allow rural phone companies to pool resources with each other and with cable companies to share new technologies and to give states the power to prevent unfair cherry-picking competition in rural markets.

....

The provisions also give the Federal and State regulators flexibility in dealing with small and mid-sized phone companies. Too often, one-sized-fits-all regulation needlessly pushes up costs for Nebraska's home town phone companies. *Id.*, at S 718.

## CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify on behalf of The State of Alaska that a true and correct copy of the foregoing "Comments of the State of Alaska" were served by first class U.S. mail, postage prepaid, this 12th day of April, 1996, upon the counsel of record as indicated on the attached service list.

  
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