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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Testimony to the
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Committee
Portals Building, 445 12th St., SW, Washington, DC 20554

RE:
Overcoming Obstacles to Telephone Service for Indians on Reservations
DA 99-430, BO Docket 99-11

By

Wayne Taylor, Jr.
Chairman
The Hopi Tribe

March 23, 1999
Chandler, Arizona

BO Docket # 99-11

The Issue:

The FCC is concerned that Indians living on reservations have less access to basic telephone service than other Americans.

The Situation on Hopi:

The Hopi Tribe is served by Century Telephone Enterprises headquartered in Louisiana. Until very recently, the service was unreliable and the equipment had not been upgraded for many years. In 1996, CenturyTel upgraded their Central Office and the remote switching stations to all digital systems. In addition they upgraded the transmitter that connects the Local Exchange to U S West. Since that time, service has dramatically improved.

There was a significant delay in additional service connections due to a merger between Pacific Telephone and Century Telephone in 1997 and 98. During this period, Century Telephone made zero investments in plant equipment. Some right of way issues were impeding additional connections but those have consequently been resolved. Future connections should proceed smoothly.

Specific Needs:

The most significant issue on Hopi is access to the Internet and advanced services. The closest Internet Service Provider is over 60 miles away, resulting in a long distance call just to connect to the Internet. The Hopi High School has a private connection to Northern Arizona University providing on premises access for high school students. The Hopi Tribal government has a low speed connection to NAU for basic e-mail and Internet access for tribal offices. Because of the low density of the population and even lower distribution of home computers, there has been no interest from outside providers to establish a local ISP.

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A second need is for a 911 service on the reservation. The current Emergency Medical Services are stationed at the Indian Health Service Unit in Keams Canyon on the eastern edge of the reservation, 40 miles from the western villages. The current procedure is to phone the BIA police who radio to the EMTs who are dispatched with limited communications support, often arriving an hour after the emergency occurs.

Although the new Hopi Health Care Center is under construction in more centralized location, there is no provision in the equipment for a 911 dispatch station at the new ambulatory center. What is needed is a coordinated effort between the Indian Health Service and BIA Police department along with the Hopi Resource Enforcement to provide a modern 911 service on the reservation.

The third area of concern is Telemedicine. The Hopi Tribe is located in one of the most remote areas of Arizona. It is impossible for the new hospital to be staffed with specialists to cover every possible medical emergency that may arise. There have been several experimental efforts to develop links with the University of Arizona and Mayo Clinic, but these were of limited scope and duration. This area requires a coordinated, long term effort to provide on-scene medical personnel with access to specialist throughout the state.

The common thread running through each of these areas is high speed advanced digital telephone service on the Hopi reservation. This is Century Telephone's only exchange within the State of Arizona. They provided limited advanced services but at premium rates, since all the customers are government entities. The Arizona Corporation Commission apparently allows these rates because there is little comparable service within miles of the Hopi reservation and this is considered a rural high cost area. In fact, Century Telephone essentially refused to sell this exchange to the Hopi Tribe during their negotiations with Pacific Telephone because, through the Universal Service Fund, this tiny exchange is very profitable to them. Unfortunately ACC does little to monitor whether the USF money is used to improve service.

ATTACHMENT

For the hearing testimony, we ask that you draw upon your experience and best knowledge to provide the following information:

- 1) To the best extent of your knowledge, how many residents in your tribe have basic telephonic service? If a resident does not have service, how long would it take on average to have services installed--in homes with previous service and in homes that never had service?
- 2) To the best extent of your knowledge, what prices do members of your tribe pay for these services? Describe the size of your telephone service area. To the best of your knowledge, do members of your reservation need to make long distance calls to reach any of the following: a doctor, a hospital, a police or fire department?
- 3) To the best of your knowledge, what is the reason(s) tribal customers lose service to their residences?
- 4) Would you say generally that the residential customers of your tribe are satisfied with their service? If not, what additional services do they desire? What obstacles do you see that prevent services from being offered throughout your reservation?
- 5) What are the initial connection charges for obtaining a residential phone on the reservation?
- 6) Do members of your tribe receive financial support for their telephone bills, and, if so, what types of support? Are the members aware of the FCC's Lifeline and Linkup programs, which are designed to make telephone service more affordable to individuals having low incomes? If so, do you know the percentage of tribal members who receive support through those programs? Does the tribe offer any source of support for tribal members to pay for residential telephone services?
- 7) Has anyone applied to the FCC's universal service program to obtain support for schools and libraries on your reservation that are seeking Internet access?
- 8) What do you see as the biggest obstacle to improving telephone penetration on your reservation?
- 9) What recommendations do you have to the FCC and to the State to improve opportunities to serve the reservation?
- 10) Are you aware of any existing tribal, state, or private facilities or equipment which can be used to develop or supplement telecommunications services to reservations?

FCC TESTIMONY

- 1) Approximately 1.700 households have telephone service.
New services one to two years. the excuse of the phone company was that there were not enough lines at the switches. This is an indication that there is no interest from the company (CenturyTel formerly Universal) to invest in their system to improve the quality of service in this area; because we are a small rural service area located away from their large urban centers in the south.
Re-hook up after disconnection take anywhere from three months to a year.
- 2) \$0.20 per minute
Size of service area is approximately 2,480 households.
No unless doctor is located off the reservation in near by town.
- 3) High cost of telephone service.
- 4) Not generally because the service is costly and when request are made for repairs, they are not made in a timely manner.
Additional services desired is reliable high speed lines (T-1) for access to the internet, 911 emergency service.
Lack of upgraded facilities to handle the additional lines and reliable connections.
- 5) \$50.00 deposit
- 6) No financial support is received for telephone service.
No, households are not aware of the FCC Lifetime and Linkup programs.
NO the Tribe does not offer any financial support for telephone service.
- 7) No, no one has applied for FCC universal service program because there is no awareness that such a program exist.
- 8) The inability of the Tribe to influence the action and operation of the company because the telephone company is regulated by the State and not the Tribe. Also the understanding of how regulation of this industry is carried out by the state is unfamiliar to the Tribe,
- 9) The regulation of this industry needs to be enforced to assure services are begin provided to the customers before any subsidies are made fro services. An example of this is the 911 service, here at Hopi customers were paying this charge and the service was never provided. To date this service is still not available; the charges have stopped but there was never any credit or adjustments made to the customers accounts for payments on this service.
- 10) Yes, currently the Tribe is working with the University of Northern Arizona to set up a satellite link for internet access at the High School.

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Message/Special Instruction:

Testimony from the Hopi Tribe.

