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From: Tracey Wilson
Common Carrier Bureau
Policy & Program Planning Division
445 12 Street
5-C150
S.W., Washington, D.C.

To: Office of the Secretary
445 12 Street.
TW-B204F
S.W., Washington, D.C.

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UNITED STATES
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

FEDERAL/STATE JOINT CONFERENCE ON ADVANCED SERVICE

WESTERN REGIONAL FIELD TRIP and HEARINGS

99-294

TAKEN ON: Friday, April 14, 2000

TAKEN AT: Tacoma Public Utilities Auditorium
3628 South 35th Street
Tacoma, Washington

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1220 L Street, N.W., Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005-4018
(202) 628-4888
hrc@concentric.net

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REPORTED BY: DIANE D. NICHOLSON, CCR
CCR NO. NICHODD519KO

Heritage Reporting Corporation
(202) 628-4888

APPEARANCES:

The Honorable Susan Ness - Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission

The Honorable Nan Thompson - Chair, Regulatory Commission of Alaska

The Honorable Marilyn Showalter - Chairwoman, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission

Don Dennis - Century Telephone

John Jones - Superintendent of Quillayute Valley School District

Roger Harrison - Forks Community Hospital

Rod Fleck - Forks City Attorney/Planner

David Danner - Governor's Locke's Executive Policy Advisor on Energy and Telecommunications

Chris Preston - SafeHarbor.com, Senior Director, Marketing

Tami Garrow - Grays Harbor Public Development Authority, Director of Business Development

Robert Lahmann - Bonneville Power Administration, Executive

John Andrist - North Cascades Broadcasting, Inc., CEO

Rob Kopp - Northwest Open Access (NoaNet), Chief Technical Officer

I N D E X

P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRWOMAN SHOWALTER: I think we are ready to start up again. We are going to move our focus from Tacoma here to Forks, Washington, which is on the Olympic Peninsula, the western most portion of Washington, and the lead for the presentation is Don Dennis, who is the Government Affairs Manager of Century Telephone and with him are John Jones, who is the Superintendent of Quillayute Valley School District; Roger Harrison, who is with the Forks Community Hospital; and Rod Fleck, who is an attorney with the City of Forks. So Don.

DON DENNIS: Thanks, Chairwoman Showalter.

CHAIRWOMAN SHOWALTER: Be sure to get your voice close enough to the mic.

DON DENNIS: That's a long ways away. Thank you, Chairwoman Showalter. I appreciate the opportunity in you inviting us here today to tell a story I think about an exciting process taken place in a small rural community in Washington State, in the community of Forks, Washington.

What the process is going to be today is I'm going to talk a little bit, but the three individuals here today are actual community leaders in the Forks area and they are really going to explain what's going on. I'll get into it a little bit, but I would kind of like to get

into a little bit of who Century Tel is.

I would also like to welcome Commissioner Ness of the FCC to our country, appreciate that, and the other commissioners, appreciate that. Chairwoman Dixon is from where our corporate headquarters is actually located. That's in Louisiana, in Monroe, Louisiana is where our corporate headquarters is located. Thank you for coming out and appreciate the opportunity to talk today. Again, my name is Don Dennis. I'm the Governmental Affairs Manager for Century Tel. I live in Gig Harbor, Washington. I have been involved in the telephone industry for approximately 33 years, public relations-wise and governmental relations.

I think each of us will be talking for approximately 10 minutes or 15 minutes today to explain our story.

Century Tel, of course -- go ahead and put that up. It's hard to see that, but we are a very large independent telephone company nationwide. We provide service in about 21 states. At this point, we have two million customers. Probably next week that's going to be 2.4 million, I think, if the aquisition of GE properties in the Midwest and the South go through. So we are growing rapidly.

The important part of that is to realize even

though we're big, we are a rural telephone company and truly a rural telephone company, and we try to maintain that throughout our presence in the community and in dealing with our customers.

Again, this kind of shows the perspective of who Century Tel is in relationship to the other independent rural companies in the nation. Go head, Tom.

By the way, Tom, thank you for your assistance. I appreciate that.

And, again, this shows our perspective across the United States and where we operate in the rural areas, pretty heavy up there in the Michigan area and, again, out in the west portion of the country.

Now, we'll get down to, as far as I'm concerned, the real important aspect of who we are in Washington State. We provide service to about 185,000 customers across the state. Those customers, again, are mostly rural. We have approximately 85 exchanges throughout the state, and if you take this into perspective, 71 of those exchanges have few than 5,000 access lines per exchange, and half of those 71 exchanges have fewer than 1,000. So you can really see our perspective as a rural telephone company.

I really wanted to show you, you can see where Forks is located, up in the northwest portion, the

northwestern portion of the State of Washington, and I highlighted that area because that's the area we are going to be talking about today.

In addition to what we are going to be talking about, I want to let everyone know that by year end we project that 40 percent of your customers throughout Washington State will have access SL service.

We are a 100 percent digital switching service throughout the State of Washington. With the exception of four communities, by year end we will be fiber back-boned to every one of those communities throughout the Washington State. That plan is being formulated and those will happen probable in 2001. We will be fiber back-boned to all of our service areas within the state, and we're proud of that. We've worked hard to do that and we have tried to stay in tune with what is happening in our communities.

Go ahead Tom.

Today we are going to be talking about integrated community network, ICN, abbreviated. I've left handouts with the Commissioners and, Commissioner Dixon, I have a large packet I'll get to you later and send it to you. Those are important packets.

Century Tel has contracted, made the expense to contract with Nortel to facilitate this process, which

you are going to be hearing about from community leaders, and I hope by the end of the presentations by the community folks, you'll really understand what ICN is going to do, and at that point we go into more detail what Century Tel is committed to do and some questions, relate to that if we haven't answered those questions.

Again, ICN and Nortel is going to facilitate and has already started facilitating the process, and we've gotten into it fairly heavily. Really with that, I would like to turn it over to the community leaders and hopefully get questions afterwards.

John Jones, Superintendent of the Quillayute School District -- John and I have been involved probably for two years on and off on different committees and pulling between each other, and some of that is reason why Forks is selected, and we'll get into that in more detail, too. John is very aggressive in what he's going to be talking about here. John.

JOHN JONES: Good Morning, and thanks for having us here. We appreciate the opportunity to share our story. What the gentleman is asking me to do is talk about the origin, how did this all come about, and I think Don has alluded to that he and I have had a relationship the last couple of years. We have been talking about and sharing with the Governor's office as well a unique

concept that we've created for the State of Washington. The concept is based and managed out of my office, again, Forks, Washington.

So what we've done is we've created a Washington virtual classroom. It's a classroom consortium and it's made up of nine school districts around the state. The projector is cutting off the last part of it and not picking up all the fine details of the picture.

The consortium is made up of nine districts across the state, and they were selected on the basis of having been rural, being small, being fairly heavily populated with minorities, and having a very poor property tax base, with the understanding that we could share our resources so that collectively we would have more to offer to our kids in our rural communities if we pool our resources that we have in each one of our schools. The way to do that, with the understanding that there's a huge geographical boundary completely across the State of Washington, is to tap into telecommunications. Our concept was to create a consortium that would be linked together by a K-20 network and for video conferencing capabilities as well, internet-based activities.

We have also created a partnership that's tied into this project. The partnership initially started with Western Washington University. It was a leader in

technology and integration of technology into K-20 education. We have since branched off to working with a partnership called North Snohomish Island Skagit County coalition. The coalition is made up of four of the five major universities in the state, and three community colleges in the northwest portion of the state. Those folks are all managed by the -- the consortium is managed by a fellow by the name of Dr. Larry Mars, who is the ex-dean of the College of Education there at Western and they've now taken on this partnership.

The reason why we went this route is now we have the resources that we can tap into from seven different universities or colleges, rather than just one single entity so that we can have a lot more access in all of our rural communities, and not just within our own K-12 settings, but also in our communities as well.

Our belief is that learning opportunities should not be determined by a person's zip code. I think the lady from Alaska may have seen this before because we did borrow it from the Kenai Penisula School District.

Our mission is to establish interconnectivity between rural schools to create expanded learning opportunities for K-12 students and staff via internet and conference-based technology.

These two slides talk a little bit about

Quillayute Valley School District. Most recently, in the last two years, in fact, we have been identified as one of the top 100 most wired high schools in the nation. So we've led the way to a certain extent. As Don said we have been fairly aggressive and thanks to the Department of Commerce and the grant funding we have been able to get from them, we have been able to wire all of our schools.

The nine schools that are participating in this project in the state itself started out with having varying of degrees of internet capabilities and wiring networking. Some had none at all. Many of us had some. Half of us had some pretty good wiring. We probably led the way in terms of sophisticated fiber optic back-boned networking.

We got enough grant money and we brought everybody up to the same level as we were and functioning well. We then improved our network so that we could interact all on the same platform. So now all of our schools, K through 12, have internet access in every teaching station and location in the schools and they also have access to video conferencing technology whereby you can take the videoconferencing equipment given to the student, rather than having to bring the students to a studio such as this.

Our nine schools are the only nine schools

that have that capability throughout the whole school system. We are not limited to how we can schedule our equipment. We have a lot of flexibility, and we have multiple sets of videoconferencing equipment.

There is our website. If you cannot read it at bottom, I can read it off to you. Of, course HTTP. WWWW.WAVCC.org. On that website you can explore all of our projects and see what we've developed. As I mentioned, we are connected through the K-20 network and those of you who are not familiar, especially those of you out of state, the the K-20 network is a network by which all colleges and universities and K-12 schools are connected together through high band width T1 lines through every school, every college and university, so we are all connected together. We are connected and it's an exceptional plan.

How it was finally implemented was a little bit behind when our project was going forward. So we had a little bit of frustration with that. Now that everything is caught up, we have been able to develop seven different projects, curriculum projects. I'm not going to go into a lot of detail, time doesn't permit me, but you can the seven here on the board.

I'd like to talk about two particularly interesting that which we probably will show how this

thing will develop even into the future. We have a Washington State history class that's a full blown globe class. It's got an internet base as well as video conferencing applications, and we have kids in all different nine school districts taking that class. It's mainly geared for students that have transferred in or failed the class, transferred in a grade level ahead of what was offered in your school. So they can take it any time any place and it's really flexible for each one of the schools to offer that. We have enough grant funding, thanks to E-rate (phonics) by the way. E-rate will allow us to have 399,000 after we've wired all of our schools into resources that we pool together to continue to develop our curriculum projects and expand Washington virtual classrooms.

The other is the water quality project. I'll skip right threw the other ones here because I think it's more important to take a look at that. Water quality has really grown. Right now we're teaching kids water quality concepts in grades three through 12. Kids in the third grade are actually going out in the streams and collecting samples and doing analysis. They are being mentored by 12th grade students who are doing the higher order chemical analyses and looking fecal coloform (phonics) as well as macro envirtabits (phonics). Middle school level

does fecal coloform and macro envirtabits (phonics). We have nine different school district collecting data from nine different streams across the State of Washington, and all of that data is being posted at the website in an interactive data base through an interactive entry system. You can real time data analysis of that information. You can chart that information and then you can be able to write sophisticated reports on that.

What I want to talk about now is what I think that Washington virtual classroom has going and you can't read my light print because we are not consistent. Let me give you a better description of where we are.

What we are attempting to do is to begin to start focusing on two primary areas. We want to focus on high tech because jobs are readily available and cannot be filled in the Northwest. I think latest statistics show data that there's 30,000 unfilled jobs in the I-5 corridor alone in high tech areas. That's part of why we are connected to this project. We need to believe if we could train our our own students to keep the best and brightest within our own schools and within our own communities, I should say, they will then turnaround and begin to invest in the economic development of their communities. But the rural communities are going to development have to teach high tech skills.

The concept is we can provide that high tech delivery of a subject from any point in the world. We don't have to worry about when and where and from, because we can capture that in a different way. Starting next fall we are going to be teaching networking essentials and Microsoft NT from two different locations simultaneously to four different schools starting in September.

White Salmon Valley will provide one teacher and Quillayute Valley will provide the other, Ocosta and Wapato will be involved and they are all four period day schools. They will be involved taking two different classes simultaneously, four different locations, all within an hour and a half first period every morning starting next fall.

The other thing we wanted to be able to develop and expand is a foreign language program. Research shows that the development of foreign language at an early age of a child's development has the highest correlation in the development of their own language and yet we are not doing this across the country. We are not doing a very good job of providing foreign language experiences and exposure to kids.

One of our desires is to be able to capture foreign language instruction from any source, whether it be our higher ed partners, our other schools partners. It

can be anyplace outside of the State of Washington. It doesn't matter. Then capture that and deliver that into video conferencing capabilities to our rural schools before, during, or after school and provide a variety of foreign languages to them.

Finally, let's expand and skip ahead here. Let me talk a little bit about interstate partnerships. We are in the process of working with the Kenai Peninsula School District to replicate their caring for the Kenai project in our Washington virtual classroom. We are exploring the idea of being able to link resources from the Alaska Sealife Center and the Alaska Challenger Learning Center in Kenai and Suldatna directly to our classrooms, not only rural Alaska by to rural Washington, as well. The only thing we have to look at in terms of barrier is band width.

We provided the band width on to Kenai and we now can actually bring in real life simulated flight experiences to our rural schools in Washington and Alaska and we can bring in the value and the wealth of resources in all the sealife center, not only Alaska but now we've established prototype to bring in all those sealife centers from around the country, and there are seven other ones, to all of our schools, as well.

The concept, again, is to be able to bring

resources to rural communities so that our kids are a level playing field and, primarily, that's our attempt to do that.

We are also expanding and looking at Tillamook County, Oregon. They have an ecosystem there that would really lend itself to contributing to our water quality project. Our water quality project is expanding. We're offering two courses. We've developed those two courses and already we're going to have them on-line this fall. We are would be able to offer that to any school that's participating in the project. It will be free of charge to any participating member. We would hope to be able to offer that to Alaska and that Alaska, in turn, with their resources would begin to start sharing their wealth and resources with us.

We have also been asked to develop two other courses that are spin-offs in water quality; one is forest management and the other is range and farm management. Again, these courses are geared to be able to provide college credit at the high school level or college credit directly from the community college or higher ed institution.

Now, I can essentially end with that. To reinforce again, our primary motive is to be able to share resources. We're utilizing technology to be able to do

that. The needs that we have that Century Tel's project is going to be able to provide us is that we are going to be able to provide our kids with a vision that there is a linkage between what is happening in their schools, in their communities, with regard to economic development that they can learn something in their high school experience that will lead to a career pathway in their community. Right now we don't see that because of our dependency upon forestry and fishery extraction. As we well know that is fairly limited at this point in time.

That's our mission. Our Quillayute Valley School District is really indebted to Century Tel to be able to provide our kids a vision for the future. With that I'll it turn it over to Roger.

DON DENNIS: Thanks, John. As you can tell, John can go on for a long time because he's really involved and excited about the entire project.

Next, we have Roger Harrison, who is the Information Service Telemedicine Manager for Clallam County Hospital District #1. Roger has been very involved in a variety of different aspects, and he and I have crossed paths in several different committee meetings, too. So Roger.

ROGER HARRISON: Thank you, Don. It's a pleasure to be here today and a privilege to be able to

address the Commission. As Don said I'm the Information Services Manager for the hospital district, also the telemedicine manager. In small communities we wear lots of hats.

As Don mentioned and John mentioned as well, we are on the edge of Olympic Peninsula there. I couldn't help but note the fellow from Tacoma Power this morning commenting about the mountains and fishing and real estate being so near by. Well, come on out, we'll show you mountains and fishing, right in your backyard.

Forks Community Hospital has a slogan that appears on our letterhead that we are pioneers in rural health care. I think that has two implications; one a positive one. We are out blazing the trails, charting new territory. Another one can have more of negative connotation, at least in health care and that's that we're out there surviving with the bare essentials. In our case I think both are true. We do have to get by with less than the major medical institutions in the urban areas. At the same time I think we have made significant progress with what we do have in providing quality health care.

One of the challenges we face on a daily basis is the technology wave or revolution and medical equipment is following a similar wave. New state-of-the-art equipment that major medical institutions in urban areas

can afford as soon as they're available are more difficult for us to get and afford. They can cost justify them by running a hundred procedures a day through a piece of equipment. It's much more difficult to cost justify that when we run four or five procedures a day. That's one of the challenges we face everyday. So we need to come up creative new ways to keep up or provide the best quality we can.

At the same time as a Seattle PI reporter recently reported, we are not going from telegraphs and typewriters it to modems and mice. We have made significant progress in technology. Of course, this is the same reporter that said we're trying to rise from a mossy oblivion. So I don't know.

I'm here to speak primarily today on our telemedicine programs that we have had at the hospital for quite some time, and I hope if time allows to touch upon what this ICN process will mean to the hospital and the community as far as health care.

Some of those areas I will just mention now in case time doesn't allow later is that we hope to explore, as a result of the ICN process, are digital and teleradiology, electronic medical records, electronic signature, electronic pharmacy orders, and electronic building processes.

In exploring these new areas we had to develop infrastructure to position us to take that further. Thanks to Century Tel and their cooperation with the hospital we have been able to do quite a bit of that with our telemedicine program. In 1998, we implemented a new health information system that rivals that in many major medical centers. That included a complete rewiring of the hospital district buildings. They are up to the latest and greatest as far as wiring infrastructure. That infrastructure and our telemedicine structure will be the foundation to allow us to go into these new areas.

As far as telemedicine applications, we have been involved in telemedicine programs since 1995, in conjunction with Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle through our Department of Commerce grant. That program was established for a pain management program. Since that time we found many other uses for that, and we continue to grow the program. Those not familiar with telemedicine applications, it is a method for communicating real time audio and video between two or more locations, and as it goes from video conferencing to telemedicine is where we take that a little further and attach these medical peripherals to that equipment that allow much improved diagnostic capabilities. So it's not just face-to-face on TV screens, it's medical peripherals connected tot that as

well, whether it's dermatology equipment or various other monitoring equipment.

Patients currently are using telemedicine program, now several years into it, primarily for speech therapy, pain management, of course, continues to grow, dermatology, and now for mental health applications. Also, it's been extensively used for your basic non-complex follow-up appointments. It's primarily used for appointments with specialists that are not available on the west side of the Olympic Peninsula or possibly not on the Olympic Peninsula as all, such as your speech pathologists and dermatologists.

There are a lot nay sayers in the telemedicine and the medical industry that don't believe telemedicine provides quality health care. I would go against that grain in that it does. When we consider for a patient who has commute six to eight hours, maybe 10 hours round trip, to see is a specialist in I-5 corridor, I believe telemedicine is a critical part of allowing us to provide high quality, timely patient care services.

Keep in mind these are people with ailments. These are not health people we are talking about having to commute through the I-5 corridor like I did last night and well again today. These are people with ailments or illnesses or elderly people that that becomes much more

difficult to make that long of a car ride.

Just last week we had a situation with a 90-year old woman who had had two strokes in two days. She had immediate need to see a speech pathologist to assess what had occurred with these strokes to her physical health. She was too unstable to be transported even by air lift. So it would be probably be several weeks for her to make the trips to receive these services. I was contacted within two hours. We had connected to a speech pathologist in Seattle, and this woman was seen three or four times during that week and she was able to get these assessments taken care of. So I would pose that question back to the group here, which of those choices is providing quality health care?

The hospital district also operates a mental health facility. We received a grant in our second year to allow us to expand our network for a mental health focus. We believe that mental health is as much a part of good community health as physical health. So we will now be going into areas such as children and family issues, drug and alcohol treatment issues in-patient discharge planning and several other to mental health areas.

Along with our connection to Virginia Mason Hospital that was established in 1995, we have now begun establishing a relationship with the University of

Washington, both the medical center and their mental health areas, with Children's Hospital here in Seattle, with Western State Hospital, a mental institution, and have begun to develop programs with some children's agencies in British Columbia.

On the Olympic Peninsula itself, which is where our network extension is concentrated, we have grown that from four sites a year ago, currently up to seven sites. By the end of next year, we will have 12 sites on the Olympic Peninsula. Those include medical institutions and mental health institutions and the Clallam County Juvenile and Family Services, the juvenile detention facility. I neglected to mention we have also two of the tribal clinics on the west end of the peninsula as well and are exploring access into the other tribes on the peninsula.

We also connect regularly to Olympic Memorial Hospital, Jefferson hospital on the peninsula as well. It's not only utilized for clinical applications, it's used for physician and medical staff education, and it's used for meetings as well. It helps us to contain costs, helps us to a attract higher quality staffing, which has always been a problem. Contrary to John's issue that we are having to send people out, we are have problems bringing people in. A lot of times we need certified

staff giving the ability to get an education and to communicate with their colleagues in the big cities has been a huge benefit.

I won't go a huge amount into the additional things we hope to see out at the ICN process as time is running out, but they're definitely there. In summing it up this technology and communications boom threatens to leave rural America behind. I believe that it also offers possibilities and opportunities for advancement for the rural communities because of the programs like Century Tel has invoked for the City of Forks and that area. We can't move our location. We can't change geography, but we can use technology and communications to lessen those distances.

This technology must be within our reach in both availability and affordability. We can't always count on grant dollars to build this stuff. We would never have this thing in place were it not for grant dollars. It has to be affordable. I've begun to adopt a new slogan for my area of the hospital and that's to move the information, not the patient.

This technology will never replace a face-to-face meeting with provider. It does give us more tools to providing quality health are. In rural communities, I believe we need every tool we can get.