

Preserve federal cell subsidy

January 27, 2008

As the sheriff of Jackson County, I am writing to call your readers' attention to a critical public safety issue, the urgent need for wireless service in rural areas of Oregon.

Public safety officials rely on cell phones to assist in search and rescue operations, domestic violence situations, undercover activities and communications in areas where police radio is unavailable. In many cases, reliable wireless service can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Unfortunately, the Federal Communications Commission has indicated its intent to cap the Universal Service Fund in the immediate future. The USF provides critical support for telecommunications companies to build new cell towers in rural areas where costs are particularly high.

Recently, concerned school officials in Sams Valley requested reliable wireless service for their community. Thanks to federal funding, U.S. Cellular constructed a tower next to the elementary school. This tower provides cellular service for the community and is an important, dependable emergency response tool for teachers, parents and residents.

Ensuring the safety of my county's residents is my top priority. To this end, I urge you to please visit www.connectingruralamerica.org to make your voice heard and help us preserve federal funding for wireless development. — Michael Winters, Jackson County sheriff