



## **North Carolina Wireless Users to Be Left Behind--Connecting Rural America**

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WILMINGTON, N.C. – Last week, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) signaled its intent to cap the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) “very soon” – most likely by November 1, 2007. This is especially dangerous for North Carolina because the federal funds that would have come into North Carolina to help expand wireless networks in rural areas will be indefinitely delayed, and rural residents will lose critical safety and economic development benefits in areas where new cell sites are not constructed.

Congress created the USF to make sure that telecommunications technology doesn't leave rural communities behind. The USF has enabled wireless carriers like U.S. Cellular to build hundreds of towers in rural communities nationwide and bring new service to areas that would not have otherwise had access.

“We can't understand why the FCC is moving forward with the cap in the face of resounding opposition from rural citizens across the country,” said John Rooney, President and CEO of U.S. Cellular. “I was invited to testify before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee in June because this is such an important issue for Americans. Fourteen members of Congress have submitted letters to the FCC describing how important the federal USF is to their constituents, and this ill-informed political agenda will only compromise rural communities across the country.”

In October 2004, U.S. Cellular filed a petition with the FCC for to become eligible to receive USF support in North Carolina. In that time, despite being given extensive evidence of the company's qualifications, the FCC has not acted on the petition.

If the petition is granted and there is no cap, the federal fund will provide an estimated \$3.8 million per year to U.S. Cellular to construct, maintain and operate wireless communications facilities in North Carolina's more rural areas. As many North Carolinians know from experience, high-quality wireless networks are crucial in the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters.

This proposed cap would hit residents of North Carolina especially hard, because while



North Carolina's consumers contribute an estimated \$200 million into the federal USF, the state currently draws out only \$5 million per year to use on wireless infrastructure development.

Without reliable wireless coverage, first responders like police officers and firefighters cannot quickly and reliably deal with critical safety issues. Also, E-911 technology is useless in areas without wireless coverage, and in high-cost rural areas, wireless companies rely on federal support to make these resources available to smaller communities.

U.S. Cellular is calling on Congress and the FCC to protect universal service funding for wireless carriers serving rural America. Rural consumers pay into the fund and deserve access to the same reliable wireless service and choices found in urban America. With universal service support, U.S. Cellular stands ready to deliver high-quality wireless service in rural parts of North Carolina - everywhere that North Carolinians live, work and play. For more information, please visit [www.connectingruralamerica.org](http://www.connectingruralamerica.org).

U.S. Cellular is the nation's sixth-largest wireless service carrier, providing wireless service to six million customers in 26 states. The Chicago-based company employs 8,000 associates and operates on a customer satisfaction strategy, meeting customer needs by providing a comprehensive range of wireless products and services, superior customer support, and a high-quality network.

For additional information please contact:

Melissa McIntyre, Public Relations Counsel, 828-777-0193, [m.mcintyre@mchsi.com](mailto:m.mcintyre@mchsi.com)

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