



## **Commentary: Don't leave rural Oregon behind**

**By John E. Rooney**

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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently signaled its intent to cap the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) "very soon" - most likely by Nov. 1, 2007. This is especially dangerous for Oregon as the USF provides critical support for wireless companies to build new cell towers in rural communities across the state.

Congress created the USF to make sure that telecommunications technology doesn't leave rural communities behind. Utilizing these funds, U.S. Cellular built towers in small, neighboring communities such as Weston, Irrigon, Stanfield and Wallowa. If the FCC succeeds in capping the USF, several planned towers in similar rural towns will be jeopardized.

Cell phones are no longer luxury items; they are a fundamental necessity. First responders like police officers and firefighters often rely on cellular coverage to quickly and reliably deal with critical safety issues and services such as E-911, which helps locate callers in distress, and needs a wireless network to work.

A freeze in funding will also widen the technological gap between urban and rural areas in the state, as well as slow economic development in our rural communities.

Those who favor a cap exclusively on wireless fail to acknowledge the real reason for fund growth: over the past three years, more than ten percent of wire customers have "cut the cord", utilizing only their cell phones for voice communications; yet federal support to landline companies remains steady at \$3 billion per year. That excess is largely funded by wireless consumers, who see no benefit from USF contributions that flow to wire networks.

Despite all of this, the FCC is still considering a cap on USF support to rural carriers.

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



the same choices as urban America.

Please visit [www.connectingruralamerica.org](http://www.connectingruralamerica.org).

We cannot afford to cap USF funding for wireless customers, because we cannot afford to leave rural Oregon behind.

*John E. Rooney is the president and CEO of U.S. Cellular.*