

Cap on wireless aid could be a disaster

By Sheriff Randy Krukow, Clay County, President, Iowa State Sheriffs' and Deputies' Association

November 5, 2007

Dear Editor:

As a law enforcement official in Iowa, I've learned first hand that the lack of high-quality wireless coverage in rural areas is a critical public safety issue.

First responders, firefighters and police officers all depend on high-quality coverage to handle emergency situations, ranging from natural disasters to car accidents to domestic violence. In many cases, reliable wireless service can literally mean the difference between life and death.

In order to minimize the public safety risks of citizens in rural communities like mine, Congress established the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF), which provides critical support for telecommunications companies to build new cell towers in areas across the country where networks otherwise would be financially infeasible. In remote parts of Iowa, there is a great need for reliable cell phone coverage so that public safety officials are able to respond quickly in emergency situations. Unfortunately for the residents of these rural areas, this much-needed USF support could soon be put into jeopardy.

Last week, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) signaled its intent to cap the USF "very soon" -- most likely by Nov. 1. Iowa's rural wireless carriers estimate that a cap would cost about \$16 million per year, jeopardizing the construction of many new rural cell sites.

The absence of good wireless service prevents those of us responsible for public safety in America's rural areas from doing our jobs properly. Poor wireless service exposes both rural law enforcement officials and the public to unreasonable health and safety risks and greatly compromises the public safety community's ability to carry out our duties in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

As a law officer, my utmost priority is to ensure the safety of the citizens in my community. I therefore believe it is critical that all Americans, regardless of geography, have equal access to reliable wireless networks. A cap on federal support for the expansion and upgrading of rural wireless technology would unfairly jeopardize the safety and well-being of rural Iowa residents and residents around the country.