

Service can be lifeline

To the editor:

I am concerned about the future of cell phone service in rural America — and of course rural Oregon in particular. Cell phones have become a necessity, allowing us to stay in touch with friends and family, conduct business and call for help in emergencies.

Law enforcement officers rely on cell phones for communication and to keep their officers safe. In terms of keeping and attracting jobs, cell phone coverage is absolutely paramount to rural areas.

The Universal Service Fund helps to improve wireless service in rural areas by providing financial support to companies that are willing to build new cell phone towers, even though it may not be profitable. Without the USF, we might still be years away from cellular service in Wheeler County. Thanks to USF funds, Fossil will have U.S. Cellular service by the end of August; areas to the south toward Spray and the John Day River Recreation Area will have service within twelve months.

The FCC placed a cap on the fund earlier this year and now wants to cut the fund in half. To me, that sounds like 50 percent fewer new cell towers being constructed in rural Oregon. Rural Oregonians will have to continue to tolerate poor cell phone coverage, dropped calls and dangerous dead zones.

We all need to urge our members of Congress to remind the FCC that the Universal Service Fund is important to our state and needs to be protected. The USF is doing good things in rural Oregon. Let's keep it going.

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