



# NEWS

**Federal Communications Commission**  
**445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.**  
**Washington, D. C. 20554**

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500  
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>  
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.  
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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News Media Contact:  
Rosemary Kimball at (202) 418-0511  
e-mail: [rosemary.kimball@fcc.gov](mailto:rosemary.kimball@fcc.gov)

**CONSUMER & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS BUREAU REPORTS ON STATUS OF  
“LANDS OF OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING RURAL CONNECTIVITY”  
*Outreach Campaign to Ensure that Rural America Has Access to Affordable and Quality  
Telecom Services Marks First Anniversary with Much Success***

Washington, DC – K. Dane Snowden, chief of the FCC’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, presented a report to the Commission on the achievements, lessons learned and future plans of the Commission’s year-old program to ensure that rural Americans have an opportunity to participate in the digital revolution.

The program is called “Lands of Opportunity: Building Rural Connectivity” and targets three key regions where the needs are particularly acute: the Appalachian Region; and the Mississippi Delta Region; and Alaska Native Villages. It also incorporates the Commission’s ongoing commitment to and focus on Indian Country.

As part of its Appalachian outreach, CGB has formed a strategic partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to address low penetration rates and other deployment issues. This partnership consists of the FCC joining ARC and the 410 rural counties which spread from northern New York to Northeast Mississippi that make up the Appalachian Region. Part of this program is an effort to bring information to millions of consumers about the availability of Lifeline/Link-Up and broadband and other advanced services. CGB has participated in conferences and symposiums to educate consumers in Appalachia about federal universal service programs and developments in telecommunications services and explored the potential of specific technologies to promote the economic development, safety, and the public general well-being of the citizens in this region.

The Mississippi Delta region has penetration rates which lie within the lowest ten percent of the Nation. In this area, CGB is working with the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) to develop a partnership through which it can engage in cooperative efforts to address the unique telecommunications needs of this region. As a first step, CGB is conducting jointly with the DRA a mailing of information on how broadband serves rural areas, and on strategies and resources for bringing broadband to all communities in the Region. CGB has identified nearly 2,000 government, community and business leaders in each of the 240 counties and parishes in the eight states that comprise the Delta

Region. This mailing will include information on Lifeline and Link-Up, the Rural Health Care program, and the Schools and Libraries program. CGB is exploring other joint outreach opportunities with the DRA, including workshops, public forums, and media news spots, in an effort to reach out to this distressed area.

The Report noted that last Fall FCC staff visited seven Alaska Native communities where they observed how advanced telecommunications services supporting innovative distance learning applications and telemedicine are being used to improve cultural welfare and health of the residents. They visited two schools located more than 25 miles above the Arctic Circle and saw how these schools are able to access the Internet; facilitate videoconferencing in the School District; augment existing curriculum; and preserve native language and culture through the development of innovative computer applications. These programs are made possible through use of broadband technologies and the E-Rate programs. They also visited rural health care facilities in the area where, through Rural Health Care Program funding, satellite technologies are being used to connect health clinics in remote communities with centrally-located specialists who are able to diagnose medical problems and devise treatment regimens to be implemented by clinic personnel.

Snowden noted, "These are but two of the many examples in which programs like E-Rate and Rural Health Care are being used to better the economic and cultural welfare of Alaska's residents. All of this is done while enabling residents to remain in the community and preserve their rural traditions and way of life. "

CGB's Indian Telecommunications Initiatives (ITI) has seen more outreach and work with American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages than ever before. Commission staff logged thousands of miles within Indian Country experiencing firsthand a snapshot of the telecommunications challenges tribes face everyday. The Commission has also strengthened its trust relationship with the Nations of Indian Country. To understand Tribal issues better, CGB added new Tribal and rural voices to those formally advising the Commission on the Intergovernmental and Consumer Advisory Committees. In all its ITI efforts, CGB solidified old friendships, established new partnerships, and focused on new areas of Indian Country where the FCC had never before visited.

"And the FCC's efforts have not gone un-noticed in Indian Country," Snowden noted. "For its work with ITI and policy consultation efforts throughout the agency, the Commission was honored by the National Congress of American Indians with its 2004 Federal Agency Leadership Award. This is a first for the FCC and truly a great honor."

CGB has also focused on opportunities to promote advanced services in other rural areas of the country, including visits to Kansas and South Dakota.

The Report noted some of the campaign's successes: an increase of 30% in the number of subscribers in Tribal areas receiving Lifeline assistance; an increase of nearly \$1.5 million in Universal Service High-cost support to tribally owned

telecommunications carriers in 2003 and an additional \$2.5 million in 2004; much greater attendance at the ITI Regional Workshop and Roundtable, as well as at other outreach events; more requests for consultation and participation from consumer, local government, and community groups; and a dramatic increase in the number of hits on the Web page.

The Report concludes that, moving forward, CGB will continue its work with state, local and tribal governments, industry and consumers, to facilitate the deployment of the broadband infrastructure necessary for a connected society that gives everyone more choices, more value, and more opportunity.

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