



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

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

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. Circ 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 6, 2003

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Linda L. Haller, 202-418-1408

NEW TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY FOR ALASKA AREAS *Increased Service and Lower Costs Expected for Consumers in Isolated Communities*

Washington, D.C.-- Today, the Commission charted a new course to increase availability of affordable, innovative interstate long-distance telecommunications services for consumers in certain remote areas in Alaska by abolishing the long-standing "Alaska Bush" satellite earth station policy and instead allowing open-entry, facilities-based competition.

The Alaska Bush communities are rural areas, small in population and isolated in geography. The Commission's Alaska Bush earth station policy prohibited the installation or operation of more than one satellite earth station in any Alaska Bush community for competitive carriage of interstate Message Telephone Service (MTS) communications, *i.e.*, ordinary interstate, interexchange toll telephone service.

In a Report and Order adopted today, the Commission eliminated this out-dated policy. Expanding entry for facilities-based competition in the interstate telecommunications market, this action promises development of improved satellite network infrastructure, lower interstate long-distance rates and greater service options ranging from telephone calls and Internet usage to emergency services, telemedicine and distance learning.

In 1995, the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) granted General Communication, Inc. (GCI), an Alaskan facilities-based interstate long-distance carrier, a temporary waiver allowing it to install earth stations in 50 Alaska Bush communities to provide *intrastate* telephone service in competition with Alascom Inc. (Alascom) on an experimental basis.

In 1996, the International Bureau granted GCI a waiver of the FCC Alaska Bush earth station policy, allowing it to provide *interstate* services in those same 50 communities. The results of this trial were positive: introduction of new technology and competition provided many benefits to consumers.

In the Alaska Bush communities where GCI constructed a second earth station in competition with the incumbent carrier, AT&T Alascom, the quality of voice service and facsimile transmissions improved; consumers were able to send and receive data transmissions and use the Internet for the first time; upgrades in the network provided more reliability for public safety and emergency services; and, for the first time, communities were able to apply

satellite telecommunications technology for telemedicine purposes and connections to schools and libraries, which has translated into large savings on medical and transportation costs.

In its decision today, the Commission found that through a series of regulatory steps, the environment that once called for the Alaska Bush earth station policy has changed. Thus, the Commission determined that there no longer is a need for the Alaska Bush earth station policy and that it is appropriate to remove it.

Action by the Commission, August 6, 2003, by Report and Order (FCC 03-197).
Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps, Martin, and Adelstein.

-FCC-

International Bureau contact: JoAnn Lucanik, 202-418-0873, JoAnn.Lucanik@fcc.gov.