

March 20, 2000

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PSC HEARING ON US WEST-QWEST MERGER SET FOR MARCH 21

The state Public Service Commission will hold a hearing in Helena on Tuesday, March 21, concerning the proposed merger of Qwest Communications and US West Communications. The hearing will be held at the PSC's Bollinger Room, 1701 Prospect Ave., beginning at 9 a.m.

Qwest is the nation's fourth largest long-distance company. The company recently completed construction of a 18,500-mile nationwide fiber optic network that connects more than 100 U.S. cities, although none of the network is in Montana. US West provides local and long distance telephone service to 25 million customers in 14 states, and has about 376,000 access lines in Montana.

According to the merger application filed by the two companies, the merger will benefit Montana customers by combining Qwest's advanced broadband network with US West's local service offerings and leadership in providing digital subscriber line technology.

Issues raised by parties to the merger review include:

- The financial aspects of the merger, such as cost of the merger, savings and benefits, and impact on rates;
- The effect of the merger on service quality for both retail and wholesale customers;
- The effect of the merger on Montana's US West workforce;
- The effect of the merger on the company's infrastructure investment;
- The effect of the merger on deployment of advanced telecommunications services in Montana;
- The effect of merger on local telephone service competition;
- The merged company's plans for obtaining federal approval of its entry into in-region long-distance entry;
- The divestiture of Qwest's long-distance arm in US West states.

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