



Montana Public Service Commission
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ROWE SELECTED AS UNIVERSAL SERVICE BOARD STATE CHAIR

Montana Public Service Chairman Bob Rowe has been selected as state chairman of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service. Rowe has been a member of the Joint Board for a number of years. The Universal Service Joint Board holds proceedings on often-complicated subjects including support to keep high cost phone service in rural areas affordable, Internet connectivity for schools and libraries, rural telemedicine, and low income telephone assistance. The Joint Board was created by Congress and makes recommendations for action to the Federal Communications Commission.

In the last several years the Joint Board has issued Recommended Decisions concerning the program to provide "high cost" support to small providers such as the companies and cooperatives that serve much of Montana; the separate program that provides support for high cost areas served by large companies including Qwest; what telecommunications services should be covered for universal service; review of the Lifeline and Link-Up programs that assist low income customers; and, the standards for determining what telephone providers are eligible to receive support. Rowe stated, "Over the coming months the Joint Board will be holding an important proceeding focused on the universal services policies that apply to small telephone companies and cooperatives, such as those that serve much of Montana. Among other things, we'll have to dig into a variety of complicated accounting and economic issues, and try to come up with policies that make sense for customers of very different companies."

According to Rowe, "It's important that universal service funds be spent properly and efficiently, and that the programs are designed to achieve the goals Congress intended. Universal service programs are important in the increasingly complicated telecommunications world, helping to ensure that as many people as possible have access to high quality service. Due to 'network effects,' even people in downtown New York are better off because they can call or e-mail everyone in South Dakota, Maine, or Montana."

Last year, Montana received \$67 million for "high cost fund support," \$3.7 million for connecting schools and libraries to the Internet; \$2 million for low income connectivity; and, \$109,000 for rural telemedicine. Along with other phone customers, Montanans pay to support these programs.

The Joint Board is comprised of three FCC Commissioners, four state commissioners from around the country, and one state consumer advocate (considered a state member). Rowe is the only state member from west of the Mississippi River, and the only Montana commissioner ever to serve on the Universal Service Joint Board. Rowe was selected as chairman by the other state members. He took over his new duties on July 1st.

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