

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
COMMISSIONER TONY CLARK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 8, 2006

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Clark Testifies on Rural Telecom Issues Before US Senate Commerce Committee

Continuing federal support for telephone networks is a key issue for rural America. That was the message North Dakota Public Service Commissioner Tony Clark delivered last week in testifying before the full US Senate Commerce Committee in Washington, DC.

Clark was part of an expert panel that discussed federal universal service fund distributions and its relationship to rural telecommunications investment. “Universal service funding is absolutely critical to states like North Dakota,” he said. “Without it, rural America would steadily fall behind our urban counterparts when it comes to investment in telecommunications networks. This program is more critical to our state than many people realize. It ensures reasonable telephone rates and comparable services for Americans living in high cost, rural areas like ours. Without this program, rural customers’ bills for even basic phone services would rise by hundreds of dollars a year.”

Eligible telecommunications providers within North Dakota annually receive over \$60 million from the federal universal service fund. The companies are required to spend the money providing and offsetting the costs of supported services within the state.

In his prepared testimony, Clark said, “We read daily about how intertwined the global information economies of Silicon Valley, New York, Los Angeles and Seattle are to those of Singapore, Tokyo, London and Bonn. In North Dakota, we like the idea of Fargo, Valley City and even tiny Mandaree being part of that global information economy too – a concept that would be unthinkable without a first class communications infrastructure.”

Clark is President of the North Dakota PSC. He is also Chairman of the Telecommunications Committee of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, a key position nationally in the field of telecommunications regulation.

Clark’s testimony and a webcast of the full hearing is available on the web at:
<http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/witnesslist.cfm?id=1708>

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