

Opening Comments

Kent Blickensderfer, CenturyLink Director of Legislative & Regulatory—ND/SD

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I am Kent Blickensderfer, CenturyLink's Director of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs for North and South Dakota. We are appearing before you today to provide information to the Commission regarding our operations in 2017 and the results of work done to fulfill the terms of the settlement agreement we signed back in November of 2016.

I will let my colleague, Julie Darrington get into the details of the extensive work performed regarding the fiber optic and electronics build project and related cable rehabilitation projects in western ND. And while we are not 100 percent satisfied with all of the outcomes in 2017, let me assure you a lot of major positive results were achieved.

The exchange areas in question are extremely challenging to serve from a telecommunications perspective as many of you will remember from our discussions a little over a year ago. Individual loop lengths are in some cases, longer than the distance from here at the Capitol to New Salem. The terrain is also quite challenging and customer density is extremely low. All of these factors make the area both expensive and difficult to maintain.

In 2017 we fully completed a fiber optic and new electronics project which is bringing substantial benefits to customers in the Belfield area. Approximately 285 Belfield area residents can now enjoy access to high speed Internet service, with some capable of reaching speeds up to 100 mbps. Customers in the Fairview exchange should also see substantial improvements to their service due to rehabilitation work that was completed and is ongoing there.

However, we did fall somewhat short of our goal of completing the last of the cable rehabilitation piece by the end of the year. There were a number of factors beyond our control which contributed to this and we will discuss those here today.

CenturyLink remains committed to these and all of our North Dakota customers. We will work hard to fully complete this project and try to make things right with customers who were inconvenienced. Our goal has been and continues to be to provide superior service to our customers here and throughout our service region. I'd now like to introduce Julie Darrington, our VP of network operations for several midwestern states, including North Dakota.