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Overcoming obstacles to Telephone Service to Indians on Reservations

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MESSAGE: Per your request, here are my preliminary thoughts on TCA's comments to the FCC on telephone service in tribal areas.

1. RUS and/or other funding mechanisms must continue to be made available to Indian tribes who choose to become their own providers.
2. Each tribal reservation has the exclusive right to provide telephone service to their sovereign nation. The nation's legal system should not hinder this.
3. Initial construction charges should not have to be borne entirely by the customer wanting service.
4. Along these same lines, alternative methods of services, ie. wireless, should be given serious consideration.
5. To combat the high cost of toll, there should be a concerted effort to allow lower cost calling throughout each reservation.
6. Federal universal service programs must allow the unconnected to get connected. Tribal areas have, by far, the most unconnected potential customers in the country.
7. Indian reservations should have first choice at receiving the wireless spectrum rights for their areas. The FCC has auctioned off the reservation areas without prior approval of the Tribes.
8. State Commissions must give reservations the ability to use their Tribal Councils as their state governing body for most issues. Reservations should be allowed to tap into state high cost funds if they abide by the state high cost fund rules or a more relaxed set of rules for the reservations.
9. Technology is not the problem. It is the cost of providing service that is the problem. We can get service to these customers if we want, but the challenge has been either recovery of costs or for the larger providers, it has sometimes been neglect. They have other areas that are more lucrative, so they concentrate their efforts there.
10. Emergency services and education will be enhanced with higher penetration rates.
11. Some current providers have been receiving tens of thousands of dollars of USF monies for reservation areas, yet the service in these same areas continues to suffer.
12. Installation times are high.

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