

News from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission

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ENSURING A CLEAR CONNECTION

Commissioners approve move to allow time for more work on critical telecommunication issues, public involvement

Citing the need for accurate communication and as much public involvement as possible, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission today unanimously approved a motion providing at least 10 more months of study and participation by all stakeholders to address issues that could impact the availability of phone service throughout Oklahoma. The matter has been commonly referred to as the “statewide toll-free proposal.”

Chairman Bob Anthony says the time is warranted to be sure all not only have their voice heard, but that all understand what the issues are.

“There are core issues at stake, such as continuing to have the telecommunications infrastructure that both cell phones and land lines as well as internet access depend upon,” Anthony said. “This proposal would have replaced many of the existing charges that telephone companies already factor into the rates they charge customers. These are not new charges but they have been mischaracterized and falsified by those with their own agenda to the point that all the public hears is the falsehood that the Commission is proposing a ‘new \$3 tax’ per line on the customers’ phone bill. The calling circles around Oklahoma City and Tulsa have had a positive economic impact on those metropolitan areas and surrounding communities. I support expanding that benefit to all Oklahomans by making sure they can receive landline and cell phone service at reasonable rates.”

Vice Chairman Jeff Cloud noted that while Oklahoma has the two largest toll-free calling areas in the country, there is more that must be done.

"Today's unanimous action was largely symbolic because the Commission has already opened a notice of inquiry which will tackle a myriad of important issues and in my judgment, address the fact that there are ‘winners and losers’ in our present system. While many small communities enjoy the economic benefit of the large calling areas, there are others who are basically punished simply because of their location outside of the Wide Area Calling Plan (WACP) areas,” Cloud said. “I intend to make sure that rural Oklahomans are afforded the same opportunity to enjoy the wide area calling scopes that customers in the urban areas are offered.”

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Commissioner Dana Murphy said it's important that all stakeholders understand the problem and be part of the solution.

“This is not an issue of whether you use a landline phone, a cellular phone, or an internet phone service,” Murphy said. “The fact is that we’re all in this together, because, regardless of the device, all Oklahomans benefit from and need what I call the backbone of the telecommunications system—landline facilities. More time is needed to clearly define the issues, and I believe part of the Commission’s role is to make sure everyone has a seat at the table as we work together toward a solution that urban consumers, rural consumers and industry can afford. This is an issue where I think we should find out what customers want, not just tell them what we think they need.”

Under today’s decision, January 19th is the earliest possible date for a decision in the matter.

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