BEFORE THE STATE CORPORATION COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF KANSAS

In the Matter of a Review of the Forward-)	
Looking High-Cost Model Used to)	Docket No. 11-GIMT- 420-GIT
Determine Cost-Based Kansas Universal)	**************************************
Service Fund Support for Price Cap Carriers)	
and Competitive Eligible)	
Telecommunications Carriers Offering)	
Service in Price Can Carrier Study Areas.	ĺ	

NOTICE OF FILING OF STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

COMES NOW the Staff of the State Corporation Commission of the State of Kansas (Staff and Commission, respectively) and, pursuant to the Commission's March 10, 2010 Order in Docket No. 08-GIMT-1023-GIT files its report and recommendation that the Commission undertake a review of the forward-looking high-cost model used to determine cost-based Kansas Universal Service Fund (KUSF) support for telecommunications carriers that have elected price cap regulation. This will also review the KUSF support for competitive eligible telecommunications carriers offering service in price cap carrier study areas.

WHEREFORE Staff requests the Commission consider its report and recommendation, issue an order opening a docket to undertake the recommended review, issue an order assessing costs against appropriate entities, develop a schedule for procedure to govern the Commission's review, and for such other and further relief as the Commission deems just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

Colleen R. Harrell, #16121

Litigation Counsel, Telecommunications

1500 S.W. Arrowhead Road

Topeka, KS 66604

(785) 271-3288 phone

(785) 271-3167 fax

c.harrell@kcc.ks.gov

Attorney for Commission Staff



REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

To: Chairman Wright

Commissioner Harkins Commissioner Loyd

From: Sandy Reams

NOV 2 4 2010

Date: November 24, 2010

RE: Proceeding to Review the Forward-Looking High-Cost Model Used to Determine the

Cost-Based Kansas Universal Service Fund (KUSF) Support for Price Cap Carriers and Competitive Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) Offering Service in Price Cap

Carrier Study Areas.

BACKGROUND

On May 19, 2008, Sprint Communications Company L.P., Sprint Spectrum L.P., and Nextel West Corp. d/b/a Sprint (Sprint) submitted a Petition requesting the Commission investigate whether the United Telephone Companies of Kansas d/b/a CenturyLink's (CenturyLink) intrastate switched access charges should be reduced to parity with its interstate access charges, pursuant to K.S.A. 66-2005(c) (Sprint Petition).

The Commission opened Docket 1023¹ to address Sprint's Petition. Parties filed direct, rebuttal, and surrebuttal testimony. Technical hearings were held May 18 - 20, 2009. On March 10, 2010, the Commission issued an Order on Sprint's Petition.² The Commission stated that the Kansas Legislature granted it the discretion to balance various goals and that it had the authority to reduce CenturyLink's intrastate switched access rates to interstate levels, with the company recovering the related access revenue from the Kansas Universal Service Fund (KUSF) on a revenue-neutral basis.³ The Commission determined that since CenturyLink's access revenue recovery would occur on a revenue-neutral basis, it would be appropriate to review the KUSF pursuant to K.S.A. 2009 Supp. 66-2008(c) and determine whether the cost to provide universal service justified modifications to the KUSF.⁴

¹ In the Matter of the Petition of Sprint Communications Company, L.P., Sprint Spectrum L.P., and Nextel West Corp. d/b/a Sprint to Conduct General Investigation into the Intrastate Access Charges of United Telephone Company of Kansas, United Telephone Company of Eastern Kansas, United Telephone Company of South Central Kansas, and United Telephone Company of Southeastern Kansas d/b/a Embarq, Docket No. 08-GIMT-1023-GIT (Docket 1023).

² Docket 1023, Order Setting Embarq's Intrastate Access Rates to Parity and Providing for Rebalancing Through the KUSF (March 10, 2010 Order).

³ Id., ¶ 232, 235.

⁴ Id, ¶ 244.

The Commission directed Staff to open a docket for the purpose of reviewing the KUSF within six to nine months from the date of the Order. The Commission recognized that significant legal issues may need to be addressed, that it may be necessary for experts to participate in the docket, and that it will be a significant undertaking. The Commission further recognized that it is unlikely that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) would have a new cost model available prior to this Commission opening the docket, which will make the review more difficult.

ANALYSIS

I. Federal Cost Model:

In 1997, the FCC adopted ten criteria to use for estimating the forward-looking economic costs of providing universal service in high-cost areas.⁵ The forward-looking costs would be recognized in a cost model that would estimate the cost to provide service to all of the businesses and households within a geographic region.⁶ The costs would reflect the most-efficient, least-cost technology that was being deployed to provide supported services.⁷ The FCC determined that all interested parties must be able to review the model, with all of the inputs, underlying data, formulae, computations, and software available and verifiable,⁸ and must be able to be examined and modified for critical assumptions and engineering principles.⁹

The FCC adopted the Hybrid Cost Proxy Model (HCPM) to determine the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) support available to price cap carriers, ¹⁰ effective July 1, 2000. The FCC recognized that the establishment of a forward-looking cost model was a dynamic process and that the model would evolve to reflect changes, including technological changes; ¹¹ however, the FCC has not updated the HCPM to reflect technology changes. Thus, the current HCPM model recognizes the forward-looking cost to deploy a circuit-switched, narrowband network to provide Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS). It does not recognize that wireless and/or interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies may be the most-efficient, least-cost technologies available today, or the costs associated with such technologies.

Although the FCC has not updated the HCPM, it is currently undertaking the reform of intercarrier compensation, interstate/intrastate separations, and the federal USF, in conjunction with its implementation of the National Broadband Plan. On April 21, 2010, the FCC released a Notice of Inquiry and a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NOI/NPRM), which among other things, requested comment on whether the FCC should use a cost model to help determine universal service support levels in areas where there is no private sector business case to provide broadband and voice services.

⁵ Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 8899, para. 224 (Universal Service First Report & Order).

⁶ Id., para. 250 (criterion 6)

⁷ Id, para. 250. (criterion 1).

⁸ Id. (criterion 8)

⁹ Id., (criterion 9)

¹⁰ Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Forward-Looking Mechanism for High-Cost Support for Non-Rural LECs, Tenth Report and Order, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 97-160, 14 FCC Rcd 20156 (1998) (Tenth Report and Order).

¹¹ Fifth Report and Order, ¶13.

II. Kansas Cost Model:

On September 30, 1999, in Docket 326, the Commission adopted the FCC's HCPM for KUSF purposes for the carriers that elected price cap regulation, which are Southwestern Bell Telephone Company d/b/a AT&T (AT&T) and CenturyLink. The Commission recognized that the FCC's cost model included over 1,400 input variables in an effort to recognize various state conditions, and that the parties to Docket 326 agreed to use those variables, with limited exceptions. Specifically, modifications to the HPCM model would reflect Kansas-specific conditions, but not company-specific conditions. This would limit the number of modifications while representing conditions that could affect all companies operating in Kansas, not just the incumbent local exchange carriers. The KUSF support available to AT&T, CenturyLink, and any designated Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) serving in AT&T's or CenturyLink's study areas is currently based on the KUSF cost model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Commission open a new docket to review the KUSF and the cost model for price cap carriers. Staff recommends the Commission address legal and policy issues prior to determining the specific cost model or inputs that should be used in the model.

A wide range of policy issues may exist; therefore, Staff recommends the Commission seek comment from parties to identify any policy or legal issues that they believe should be addressed by the Commission. Initial issues that may need to be considered include: 1) the level of participation of providers of alternative technologies, such as VoIP and wireless, in the market; 2) whether and how the National Broadband Plan and federal USF reform should be addressed in such a review of the KUSF cost model; 3) whether the Commission should review the definition of universal service for Kansas; and, 4) whether the Commission should phase out competitive ETC KUSF support, similar to the proposal to phase out federal competitive ETC support in the National Broadband Plan.

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¹² In the Matter of an Investigation Into the Kansas Universal Service Fund (KUSF) Mechanism for the Purpose of Modifying the KUSF and Establishing a Cost-Based Fund, Docket No. 99-GIMT-326-GIT (Docket 326), Order No. 10: Adopting a Forward Looking Cost Methodology for Purposes of Determining KUSF Support and Selecting the FCC's Cost Proxy Model (Order 10).

¹³ Docket 326, Order 16: Determining the Kansas-Specific Inputs to the FCC Cost-Proxy Model to Establish a Cost-Based Kansas Universal Service Fund (Order 16), p.3.

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I, the undersigned, hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the above and foregoing Notice of Filing of Staff Report and Recommendation was placed in the United States mail, postage prepaid, or hand-delivered this 8th day of December, 2010, to the following:

JAMES T. MEISTER
ALLTEL KANSAS LIMITED PARTNERSHIP
ONE ALLIED DRIVE
MAIL STOP 1269-B5F11-C
P O BOX 2177
LITTLE ROCK, AR 72202-2177
Fax: 501-905-5679

DENNIS W DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER/CEO BLUE VALLEY TELE-COMMUNICATIONS, INC. 1559 PONY EXPRESS HIGHWAY HOME, KS 66438 Fax: 785-799-3530 ddoyle@bluevalley.net

CATHERINE VEACH MOYER 120 WEST KANSAS AVENUE PO BOX 707 ULYSSES, KS 67880

MICHAEL A. PIERCE, WIRELESS MANAGER
CELLULAR NETWORK PARTNERSHIP
D/B/A PIONEER CELLULAR
RON COMINGDEER & ASSOCIATES
6011 N ROBINSON
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73118
Fax: 405-375-0782
nekretchmar@ptci.com

JIM DAHMEN, MANAGER
COLUMBUS TELEPHONE CO. INC.
224 SOUTH KANSAS AVENUE
COLUMBUS, KS 66725
Fax: 620-429-1704
jdahmen@columbus-ks.com

CURT STAMP, DIRECTOR-REGULATORY AFFAIRS COX KANSAS TELCOM, L.L.C. D/B/A COX COMMUNICATIONS, INC 901 S GEORGE WASHINGTON BLVD WICHITA, KS 67211-3901 Fax: 405-821-3097 curt.stamp@cox.com

GERARD J. HOWE, CEO
BIG RIVER TELEPHONE COMPANY, LLC
24 SOUTH MINNESOTA AVENUE
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO 63703
Fax: 573-651-3605
jhowe@bigrivertelephone.com

JACK KUHLMANN, PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER BLUESTEM TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. P O BOX 199 908 FRONTVIEW DODGE CITY, KS 67801-0199

LINDA STEVENS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR-FINANCE CELLCO PARTNERSHIP D/B/A VERIZON WIRELESS ONE VERIZON PLACE ALPHARETTA, GA 30004-8511

DAVID SPRINGE, CONSUMER COUNSEL CITIZENS' UTILITY RATEPAYER BOARD 1500 SW ARROWHEAD ROAD TOPEKA, KS 66604
Fax: 785-271-3116
d.springe@curb.kansas.gov
**** Hand Deliver ****

DALE JONES, GENERAL MANAGER
COUNCIL GROVE TELEPHONE COMPANY
PO BOX 299
COUNCIL GROVE, KS 66846
Fax: 316-767-5199
djones@tctelco.net

CRAIG WILBERT, GENERAL MANAGER
CRAW-KAN TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE, INC.
200 N. OZARK
P.O. BOX 100
GIRARD, KS 66743
crwilbert@ckt.net

11-GIMT-420-GIT

BRENT CUNNINGHAM, VICE PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER
CUNNINGHAM TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC.
220 W MAIN
PO BOX 108
CLEN FLDER KS 67446

GLEN ELDER, KS 67446 Fax: 785-545-3277

BOB BOALDIN, PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER ELKHART TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC.

610 SOUTH COSMOS PO BOX 817 ELKHART, KS 67950 Fax: 620-697-4262

bboaldin@epictouch.com

TRENT BOALDIN, PRESIDENT EPIC TOUCH CO. 610 S. COSMOS P.O. BOX 1260 ELKHART, KS 67950-1260 Fax: 620-697-9997 td@elkhart.com

THOMAS E GLEASON JR, ATTORNEY GLEASON & DOTY CHTD PO BOX 6 LAWRENCE, KS 66044-0006 Fax: 785-856-6800 gleason@sunflower.com

MICHAEL J MURPHY, PRESIDENT & MANAGER GORHAM TELEPHONE COMPANY 100 MARKET PO BOX 235 GORHAM, KS 67640 Fax: 785-637-5590

ROBERT A KOCH, PRESIDENT/GEN MGR H&B COMMUNICATIONS, INC. 108 NORTH MAIN PO BOX 108 HOLYROOD, KS 67450 Fax: 785-252-3229 DAVID DORWART, PRESIDENT/CEO DPI-TELECONNECT, L.L.C. 3350 BOYINGTON DR #200 CARROLLTON, TX 75006-5028 Fax: 972-488-8636

JOHN R. IDOUX, STATE DIRECTOR REGULATORY AFFAIRS/KSOPKJ0401
EMBARQ COMMUNICATIONS, INC.
D/B/A CENTURYLINK COMMUNICATIONS
CENTURYLINK
5454 WEST 110TH STREET
OVERLAND PARK, KS 66211
Fax: 913-345-7955
john.idoux@embarq.com

PATRICK L MORSE, SR VP - GOV AFFAIRS FAIRPOINT COMMUNICATIONS MISSOURI, INC. 908 WEST FRONTVIEW PO BOX 199 DODGE CITY, KS 67801 Fax: 620-227-8576 pmorse@fairpoint.com

GERALD WASHBURN, GENERAL MANAGER GOLDEN BELT TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION. 103 LINCOLN ST PO BOX 229 RUSH CENTER, KS 67575 Fax: 785-372-4210

ROBERT A. KOCH, PRESIDENT/GEN MGR H&B CABLE SERVICE, INC.

108 NORTH MAIN
PO BOX 108
HOLYROOD, KS 67450
Fax: 785-252-3229
robkoch@hbcomm.net

MARK WADE, PRESIDENT/GEN MANAGER HAVILAND TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. PO BOX 308
106 NORTH MAIN
HAVILAND, KS 67059
Fax: 620-862-7299
mark@havilandtelco.com

11-GIMT-420-GIT

CARLA SHEARER, PRESIDENT HOME TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. BOX 8 211 SOUTH MAIN GALVA, KS 67443 Fax: 620-654-3122 carla@hometelephone.com

GENE MORRIS, PRESIDENT/GENERAL MGR. JAMES M. CAPLINGER, ATTORNEY J.B.N. TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. 418 WEST 5TH ST., SUITE A HOLTON, KS 66436 Fax: 785-866-4121

GREG ALDRIDGE, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER KANOKLA TELEPHONE ASSN., INC. PO BOX 111 100 KANOKLA AVENUE CALDWELL, KS 67022 Fax: 620-845-5636

ANGIE M. WATSON, PRESIDENT LIFECONNEX TELECOM, LLC D/B/A ANGLES COMMUNICATIONS 6905 N WICKHAM ROAD STE 403 MELBOURNE, FL 32940 Fax: 850-492-5085 awatson@lifeconnex.com

MARY MEYER, CEO MADISON TELEPHONE LLC 117 NORTH THIRD PO BOX 337 MADISON, KS 66860-0337 Fax: 620-437-2108 mmeyer@madtel.net

HARRY M WEELBORG, VICE PRESIDENT MOUNDRIDGE TELEPHONE COMPANY 109 NORTH CHRISTIAN AVENUE BOX 960 MOUNDRIDGE, KS 67107 Fax: 620-345-6106

PATRICK MCDONOUGH, VICE PRESIDENT I-WIRELESS, LLC 1 LEVEE WAY, SUITE 3104 NEWPORT, KY 41071-1661 Fax: 859-261-6639 pat.mcdonough@iwirelesshome.com

JAMES M. CAPLINGER, CHARTERED 823 W 10TH STREET TOPEKA, KS 66612 Fax: 785-232-0724 jim@caplinger.net

HARRY J LEE JR, PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER LAHARPE TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. D/B/A LAHARPE LONG DISTANCE 109 W. 6TH STREET PO BOX 100 LA HARPE, KS 66751

SHERRY L. DEWITT, PRESIDENT MADISON TELEPHONE LLC 117 NORTH THIRD PO BOX 337 MADISON, KS 66860-0337 Fax: 620-437-2108

JANE PRETTYMAN, GENERAL MANAGER MOKAN DIAL, INC. PO BOX 429 LOUISBURG, KS 66053-0429 Fax: 913-837-5108 jkp@townes.net

JIMMY TODD, GENERAL MANAGER MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY PO BOX 338 365 MAIN STREET LITTLE RIVER, KS 67457 Fax: 620-897-6211 itodd@1rmutua1.com

11-GIMT-420-GIT

ANDREW R. NEWELL, GENERAL COUNSEL
NE COLORADO CELLULAR, INC.
D/B/A VIAERO WIRELESS
1224 W PLATTE AVENUE
FORT MORGAN, CO 80701
andrew.newell@viaero.com

LARRY SEVIER, GENERAL MANAGER
NEX-TECH, INC.
2418 VINE STREET
PO BOX 339
HAYS, KS 67601
Fax: 785-625-4479

KATHY FAIRCLOTH, GENERAL MANAGER PEOPLES TELECOMMUNICATIONS, LLC 208 N BROADWAY P O BOX 450 LA CYGNE, KS 66040 kathy@peoplestelecom.net

JAMES LEDNICKY, GENERAL MANAGER
RAINBOW TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION, INC. SERVICES
7TH AND MAIN
PO BOX 147
EVEREST, KS 66424
Fax: 785-548-7517

ELIZABETE
RCC MINNE
302 MOUNT
COLCHESTE

LARRY E SEVIER, CEO/GENERAL MGR RURAL TELEPHONE SERVICE COMPANY, INC. 145 N MAIN P O BOX 158 LENORA, KS 67645 Fax: 785-567-4401 larrys@ruraltel.com

JANET BATHURST, GENERAL MANAGER
S&A TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC.
413 MAIN STREET
PO BOX 68
ALLEN, KS 66833
Fax: 620-528-3226
jbathurst@satelephone.com

JOHNIE JOHNSON, CEO/GEN MGR NEX-TECH WIRELESS, L.L.C 3001 NEW WAY HAYS, KS 67601 Fax: 785-265-4479 jjohnson@ntwls.com

STEVEN FENKER, VICE PRESIDENT NEXUS COMMUNICATIONS, INC. 3629 CLEVELAND AVENUE, #C PO BOX 247168 COLUMBUS, OH 43224 Fax: 740-548-1173 sfenker1@earthlink.net

RICHARD K. VEACH, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER PIONEER TELEPHONE ASSN., INC. D/B/A PIONEER COMMUNICATIONS 120 N. BAUGHMAN PO BOX 707 ULYSSES, KS 67880 Fax: 620-424-3109 dick@pioncomm.net

ELIZABETH L. KOHLER, VICE PRESIDENT OF LEGAL SERVICES
RCC MINNESOTA, INC.
302 MOUNTAIN VIEW DRIVE
SUITE 200
COLCHESTER, VT 05446
Fax: 802-655-3214
bethlk@rccw.com

CAROLYN R. SOMERS, CFO S & T COMMUNICATIONS LLC 320 KANSAS AVENUE PO BOX 99 BREWSTER, KS 67732 Fax: 785-694-2750

STEVE RICHARDS, GENERAL MANAGER
S&T TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, INC.
320 KANSAS AVENUE
PO BOX 99
BREWSTER, KS 67732
Fax: 785-694-2750

11-GIMT-420-GIT

SHERRI FLATT, EXC. DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONAL COMPLIANCE

SAGE TELECOM, INC. 3300 E RENNER ROAD

STE 350

RICHARDSON, TX 75082-2800

Fax: 214-495-4789

sflatt@sagetelecom.net

sdavis@sctelcom.com

STEPHEN W. DAVIS, GENERAL MANAGER SOUTH CENTRAL TELEPHONE ASSN. INC. 101 S. MAIN PO DRAWER B MEDICINE LODGE, KS 67104 Fax: 620-930-1050

STEVE HAHN, PRESIDENT SOUTHWESTERN BELL TELEPHONE CO. D/B/A AT&T 220 EAST SIXTH STREET TOPEKA, KS 66603

BRUCE A. NEY, ATTORNEY, ROOM 515 SOUTHWESTERN BELL TELEPHONE CO. D/B/A AT&T 220 EAST SIXTH STREET TOPEKA, KS 66603 Fax: 785-276-1948 bruce.ney@att.com

JACK KUHLMANN, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS SUNFLOWER TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. D/B/A FAIRPOINT COMMUNICATIONS P O BOX 199 DODGE CITY, KS 67801-0199 Fax: 620-227-8576

ROBERT A. FOX, ATTORNEY THE STEGALL LAW FIRM 504 PLAZA DRIVE PERRY, KS 66073 Fax: 785-597-5766 bfox@steglaw.com SUSAN B CUNNINGHAM, COUNSEL SNR DENTON US LLP 7028 SW 69TH ST AUBURN, KS 66402-9421 Fax: 816-531-7545 susan.cunningham@snrdenton.com

KENDALL S. MIKESELL, PRESIDENT SOUTHERN KANSAS TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. 112 SOUTH LEE STREET PO BOX 800 CLEARWATER, KS 67026-0800 Fax: 620-584-2268

ANN HUGHES, AREA MANAGER-REGULATORY ISSUES, ROOM 500
SOUTHWESTERN BELL TELEPHONE CO.
D/B/A AT&T
220 EAST SIXTH STREET
TOPEKA, KS 66603
Fax: 785-276-1988
ah5177@momail.att.com

SUSAN SHERWOOD SPRINT SPECTRUM 6500 SPRINT PARKWAY MS:HL-5ASTX OVERLAND PARK, KS 66251

LISA BROWN
TENNESSEE TELEPHONE SERVICE, LLC
D/B/A FREEDOM COMMUNICATIONS USA, LLC
3483 SATELLITE BLVD
STE 202
DULUTH, GA 30096
Fax: 678-681-7580
lbrown@rtclic.net

MARK M. GAILEY, PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER TOTAH COMMUNICATIONS, INC. 101 MAIN STREET PO BOX 300 OCHELATA, OK 74051-0300 Fax: 918-535-2701

11-GIMT-420-GIT

RICHARD B. SALZMAN, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT DALE JONES, GENERAL MANAGER TRACFONE WIRELESS, INC. 9700 N.W. 112TH AVENUE

MIAMI, FL 33178

TRI-COUNTY TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION, INC. 1568 S 1000 ROAD PO BOX 299 COUNCIL GROVE, KS 66846 Fax: 785-366-7007 djones@tctelco.net

MICHAEL J FOSTER, PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER TWIN VALLEY TELEPHONE, INC. 22 SPRUCE MILTONVALE, KS 67466

Fax: 785-427-2216

mike.foster@tvtinc.net

CRAIG MOCK, GENERAL MANAGER UNITED TELEPHONE ASSN., INC. 1107 MCARTOR RD PO BOX 117 DODGE CITY, KS 67801 Fax: 620-227-7032 craigm@unitedtelecom.net

JOHN R IDOUX, STATE DIRECTOR REGULATORY AFFAIRS UNITED TELEPHONE CO. OF KANSAS D/B/A CENTURYLINK 5454 W 110TH STREET OVERLAND PARK, KS 66211-1204 Fax: 913-345-7955 john.idoux@embarg.com

ROGER HAHN/KSOPKJ05025042 UNITED TELEPHONE COMPANY OF EASTERN KANSAS D/B/A CENTURYLINK 5454 W 110TH STREET OVERLAND PARK, KS 66211-1204

DON HOWELL, PRESIDENT UNITED WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS, INC. 1107 MCARTOR ROAD DODGE CITY, KS 67801

TONY SUSAK VIRGIN MOBILE USA, L.P. 10 INDEPENDENCE BLVD

GRANT SPELLMEIER, DIRECTOR, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS USCOC OF NEBRASKA/KANSAS LLC 8410 BRYN MAWR CHICAGO, IL 60631 Fax: 847-864-3133

WARREN, NJ 07059

STEVEN L SACKRIDER, PRESIDENT/GEN MGR WAMEGO TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY, INC. 1009 LINCOLN PO BOX 25 WAMEGO, KS 66547-0025 Fax: 785-456-9903

RICHARD VEACH, PRESIDENT WESTLINK COMMUNICATIONS, L.L.C. 120 WEST KANSAS AVENUE ULYSSES, KS 67880

ARCHIE MACIAS, GENERAL MANAGER WHEAT STATE TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. PO BOX 320 UDALL, KS 67146 Fax: 620-782-3302 agmacias@wheatstate.com

steve.sackrider@wamtelco.com

11-GIMT-420-GIT

DANIEL P. FRIESEN, OWNER
WILDFLOWER TELECOMMUNICATIONS, LLC
102 NORTH MAIN
PO BOX 258
BUHLER, KS 67522
Fax: 866-459-2829
dfriesen@ideateksystems.com

JEFFREY PFAFF, REGULATORY AFFAIRS, LEGAL DEPT
WIRELESS CO., LP
D/B/A SPRINT PCS
KSOPHIO414
6160 SPRINT PARKWAY 4TH FLOOR
OVERLAND PARK, KS 66251
Fax: 913-523-7721
jeff.m.pfaff@sprint.com

KATHY PRICE, GENERAL MANAGER ZENDA TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. 208 NORTH MAIN PO BOX 128 ZENDA, KS 67159 Fax: 620-243-7611 kprice@onlinezenda.net

BRIAN BOISVERT, GENERAL MANAGER WILSON TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. 2504 AVENUE D
BOX 190
WILSON, KS 67490-0190
Fax: 785-658-3344
boisvert@wtciweb.com

DEBORAH D GARZA, PRESIDENT YOURTEL AMERICA, INC. P O BOX 270017 KANSAS CITY, MO 64127

Pamela Griffeth

Administrative Specialist