

Connections

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLORADO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Bill Owens, Governor • Rick O'Donnell, DORA Executive Director

MAY 2003

STARTING POINT



By Bruce Smith
Director

In spite of the state's current budget challenges, it's reassuring to know that others recognize the importance of the issues that we deal with at the Public Utilities Commission and the work we do for the citizens of Colorado on a daily basis. Two recent examples of this come to mind.

The first was the smooth passage of the PUC's continuation bill during the recent legislative session, which ensures that the doors of this agency will remain open through at least 2008. While it doesn't come as a huge surprise that the PUC's authority was extended for five years, it's nice to know that our work continues to be deemed relevant and vital by legislators.

In approving the continuation, lawmakers recognized that the PUC impacts the lives of virtually every Colorado citizen in one way or another, overseeing about \$3.3 billion in annual revenues of the regulated utilities. As was noted in the Department of Regulatory Agencies' PUC Sunset Report, "In the absence of federal regulation, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission is the state agency that ensures the smooth functioning of this important sector of Colorado's economy and at the same time acts to protect public health and safety."

The second example of outside recognition of the value of this agency was found in the selection of the recent DORAward winners. The program recognizes outstanding achievement and customer service throughout DORA's 11 divisions and three offices and the PUC claimed top honors in two of the five categories.

Congratulations to **Wendie Allstot**, **Becky Quintana** and **Mana Jennings-Fader**, selected as DORA's Group/Team of the Year for their work in developing the Colorado Performance Assurance Plan for Qwest; and to **Pam Fischhaber**, winner in the Customer Service category for her pivotal, creative and fair advocacy in two major Commission proceedings. These folks are truly deserving of the accolades they have received, as were the other PUC nominees: **John Trogonoski** for Employee of the Year, **Denise Coven** for Outstanding Service, and **Warren Wendling** for Manager of the Year.

The individuals mentioned above are representative of the deep dedication, supreme skill and profound professionalism that the entire PUC staff displays on a daily

(Continued on page 4)

New PUC chairman settles into job

Former assistant AG Gregory Sopkin takes reins of Commission

Gregory E. Sopkin, a former Assistant Attorney General who represented PUC trial staff in cases before the Commission, is settling into his new role on the other side of the bench.

Sopkin has served three months as chairman of the Public Utilities Commission. He was sworn in Jan. 31 after being appointed by Governor Bill Owens and confirmed by the Colorado Senate. Sopkin replaced Ray Gifford, whose term expired in January.

"The citizens of Colorado will benefit greatly from Greg Sopkin's experience," Governor Owens said in announcing the appointment. "He has a unique and thorough understanding of the complex issues facing the PUC. His broad experience in the public and private sectors will give him a solid grounding to lead the PUC in these times of dynamic change in technology and telecommunications."

During his three years with the state Attorney General's Office, from September 1997 to August 2000, Sopkin represented the PUC staff in proceedings before the Commission as well as district court, the Colorado Supreme Court and federal courts. In August 2000 he left the Attorney General's office to enter private practice with a Denver law firm.

Sopkin, who has a degree in Business Administration from the University of Illinois and a law degree from the University of Colorado, was appointed to a four-year term that runs until January 2007. He joins Commissioners **Polly Page**, whose term expires in 2004, and **Jim Dyer**, whose term expires in 2005, on the PUC bench.

Sopkin lives in Lakewood with his wife and four daughters.



Gregory Sopkin (right) takes the oath of office from Colorado Court of Appeals Judge Henry Nieto during swearing in ceremonies for the new Public Utilities Commission chairman.

Message from the Chairman

I am excited to have the opportunity to work with such a terrific and learned group of people. When I worked at the Attorney General's Office for the PUC, I got to know many of the staff. I developed great respect for the institutional knowledge and hard work of the persons who make this place work. I only hope that the gurus who are at the top of the mountain choose to hang on for another four years. And that goes for the talented newer staff as well.

Having practiced utility work as an attorney for several years, I also recognize the professionalism demonstrated by the PUC bar. Utilities are fortunate to have such competent representation in

Colorado. I know the world mourns the loss of an attorney practicing in any field, and I will sorely miss filling out billable hour sheets.

The three Commissioners who I did the most work for were Vince Majkowski, Bob Hix, and Ray Gifford. I could not have asked for better role models, and am humbled to now have the same title. In that respect, my door is open for everyone to let me know when my actions or words do not live up to that standard. I also would like to hear your ideas on how utilities could be better regulated (or unregulated), and any other grand ideas. I look forward to a great four years

—Chairman Greg Sopkin

Legislators extend PUC through 2008

The Colorado Legislature has extended the regulatory authority of the Public Utilities Commission through at least July 1, 2008.

The legislature passed Senate Bill 03-223, which continues the PUC for the next five years, early in this year's session. Governor Bill Owens signed the bill into law on March 20.

A companion bill, Senate Bill 03-225, which adopted a number of recommendations from the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) Sunset Report concerning the PUC, was approved in April.

State law requires a periodic review of all state regulatory agencies to evaluate the need for and the effectiveness of the agency's functions. The PUC's last sunset review in 1998 extended the agency through 2003.

A proposal to establish subsequent PUC sunset reviews by industry or function—such as telecommunications, electricity, administrative hearings, etc.—and stagger them every two years

was eliminated from the sunset bill. The new law calls for all PUC functions to be reviewed again in 2008.

The other DORA recommendations were addressed in SB 03-225, which was split off on its own track by lawmakers. A recommendation to grant the PUC the authority to directly fine telecommunications companies for violations of its rules was abolished from the bill. Under current statutes, the PUC must seek fines through district court.

The most significant change approved by the legislature allows the PUC to require telecommunications providers to post a bond or provide other security as a condition of obtaining operating authority.

In setting the amount of the bond, the PUC may consider the financial viability of the provider, as evidenced by audited financial statements; the total amount of deposits made by customers to the provider to obtain service and the aggregate amount of prepay-

ments made by customers for monthly regulated services; and the history of the provider's payment obligations, including those to the Colorado High Cost Support Mechanism, the Colorado Telephone Low-Income Assistance Program, the Colorado Telephone Relay System, and the Colorado Fixed Utility Fund.

Other changes approved by the legislature:

- Increasing permit fees for towing carriers from \$10 to \$150; and requiring towing carriers to provide cost information to assist the PUC in setting market-based rates for non-consensual tows.
- Increasing civil penalties for transportation and gas safety related violations to levels consistent with federal penalties.
- Removing the Highway Crossing Protection Fund from the Highway Users Tax Fund; and other minor wording and housekeeping changes.

PUC grabs honors in two DOR Awards categories

Public Utilities Commission staff members fared well again in the annual DOR Awards program, capturing top honors in the Group/Team of the Year and Customer Service categories.

Wendie Allstot, **Becky Quintana** and **Mana Jennings-Fader** received the award in the Group/Team of the Year category for their work on the Colorado Performance Assurance Plan (CPAP). **Pam Fischhaber** was honored in the Customer Service category for her efforts in the Xcel rate case and Colorado High Cost Support Mechanism dockets. They were selected from nominations from all of the Department of Regulatory Agencies 11 divisions and three offices.

The DOR Awards program was created in 2001 to recognize outstanding achievements in customer service on the department level. Awards presented for 2002

included Group/Team of the Year, Outstanding Service, Customer Service, Manager of the Year, and Employee of the Year.

Allstot, Quintana and Jennings-Fader were cited for their work in developing the CPAP, a unique utility performance plan that will promote a competitive telecommunications market in Colorado resulting in new product offerings, lower prices and more carrier choices for consumers.

"The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recognized this plan nationally. And the Colorado plan has been used as the model plan in other states Qwest serves," PUC Director Bruce Smith wrote in nominating the group.

In its recommendation to the FCC to allow Qwest to re-enter the long-distance market in its local service region, the PUC

Commissioners cited "the CPAP as the single most important innovation of this process."

Allstot, a PUC engineer for nine years; Quintana, a PUC financial analyst for 6.5 years; and Jennings-Fader, a former assistant Attorney General (now a PUC administrative law judge), who served as the legal counsel for the team and the PUC on this issue, were responsible for this creative innovation.

Fischhaber, a professional engineer who has worked at the PUC for 2.5 years, was described in her nomination form as "an outstanding and dedicated professional with an exemplary degree of professional integrity." Her work on depreciation issues in the 2002 Xcel rate case led to a stipulation that reduced the proposed rate increase by more than \$30 million.

"It is rare for a utility company and other entities to a proceeding to acknowledge the hard work and quality of work by its opponent. Yet, that's what happened here," Smith said.

Fischhaber received similar praise in a recent telecommunications proceeding before the PUC, where members of both the cellular industry and incumbent local providers urged an administrative law judge to adopt her position on various issues.

Other PUC staffers nominated for awards this year included: **Denise Coven** in the Outstanding Service category; **Warren Wendling** in the Manager of the Year category; and **John Trogonoski** in the Employee of the Year category.

PUC economist **Dr. Gary Schmitz** won DORA's Employee of the Year award last year.

PUC's Jantzen takes bite out of T-Rex costs

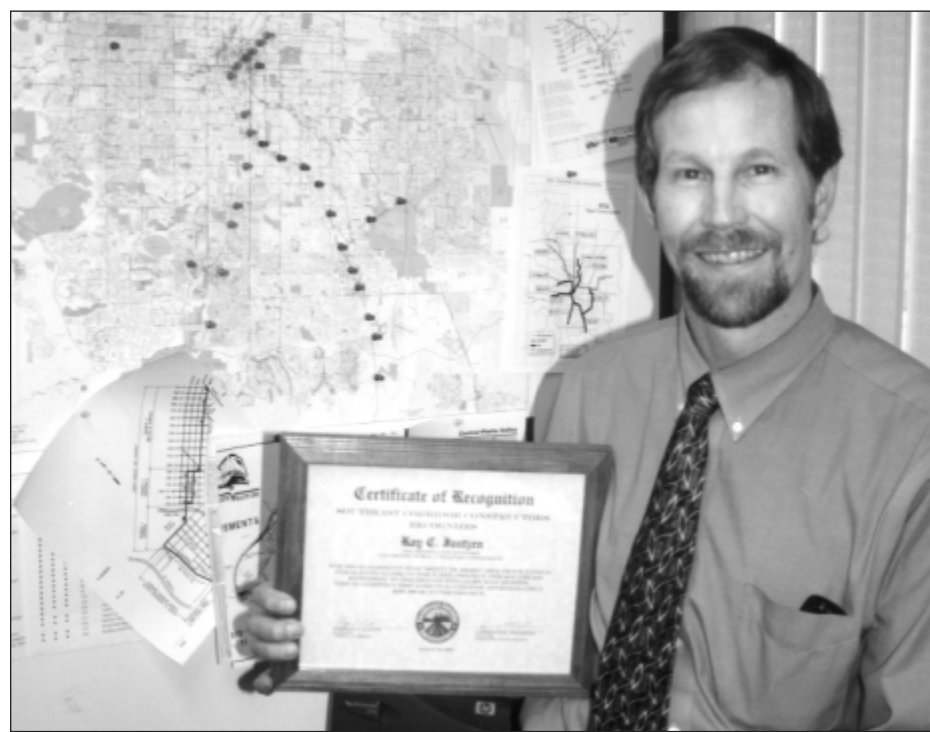
When the final tally of construction costs for the Southeast Corridor rapid transit/expansion project comes in, it will be at least a half a million dollars below what it could have been, thanks to a suggestion from PUC Transportation Engineer **Ray Jantzen**.

Jantzen was honored recently by the Southeast Corridor constructors for a money-saving idea to substitute removable fence panels for sliding gates on the T-Rex project, the southeast extension of the Denver RTD light rail system.

Jantzen serves on the Fire/Life/Safety Committee for the project. The committee consists of representatives from RTD, T-Rex, the PUC and emergency management jurisdictions along the southeast construction corridor.

As the committee was reviewing plans for exits to provide emergency access to the RTD light rail corridor, Jantzen suggested removable sections of chain link fence at the access points instead of considerably more expensive sliding gates.

"This suggestion resulted in savings of approximately \$500,000 to the



Ray Jantzen, shown in front of a map of the southeast corridor expansion, displays the plaque he received for his cost-cutting suggestion.

project," said Stephen Martin, manager of light rail design for the Southeast Corridor constructors.

In recognition of his suggestion, Jantzen was awarded a plaque at the group's meeting on March 12.

PUC proceedings now seen on web

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) launched its live webcasting service in March, becoming the first state agency to make its proceedings available to the public by video over the Internet.

The webcasting service further expands the accessibility of the PUC to the public and greatly enhances its ability to provide information to the public.

"As a firm believer in the importance of transparency in government, this tool allows the public to hear and to see how the PUC operates," said **Rick O'Donnell**, executive director of the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA). "Given the critical utility issues before the PUC right now, I couldn't imagine a better time to launch this tool so that those affected by PUC decisions can take part in the process more readily."

PUC weekly meetings, hearings, deliberations and other proceedings in both PUC hearing rooms can now be viewed on-line. A live signal is sent from the PUC to the DORA web server, which then broadcasts the signal to the Internet. The webcasts offer only one-way communication. Viewers or listeners are not able to testify or respond to discussions.

"We regularly receive requests from folks who do business here to be able to monitor PUC proceedings from off-site," Director **Bruce Smith** said. "The use of this technology is another way of improving the service that we provide the customers of this agency."

People interested in viewing the webcasts can link to them directly from the PUC web site. Go to the PUC home page at www.dora.state.co.us/puc/ and click on the webcasting button.



Doug Platt

As supervisor of the Public Utilities Commission's consumer complaint group, **Doug Platt** describes his job as "half consumer public relations and half compliance officer."

"I am responsible for a staff that half of the time has to explain to customers why they need to obey the utility, and the other half has to explain to the utility why they have to obey the PUC," he says.

Doug has been with the PUC's External Affairs section since November of 2000, and was named supervisor of the complaint unit in March following the retirement of Judy Dunn. He oversees a staff of five other complaint specialists, besides himself.

The group provides assistance to consumers who have questions or complaints about their utility services. The specialists help resolve customer issues about rates or service by making sure that utilities follow their tariffs and comply with PUC rules.

INSIDE CONNECTIONS

"No two days are alike. The variety and complexity of consumer issues requires that we all remain up-to-date on current topics, and listen closely to details of a consumer's issue," said Doug, who adheres to the Harry S. Truman adage that "it's what you learn after you know it all that really counts."

Doug has been a state employee for more than 10 years. Prior to coming to the PUC he worked for a short time as a bailiff in a Denver District criminal court. He also spent more than six years with the Colorado Lottery, including four years as Drawing Manager—producing and supervising the live, on-air drawing telecast on

Channel 4. He earned a variety of industry awards for media relations and promotions during his tenure with the Lottery.

Doug holds a degree in Organizational Management and Mass Media from the University of Northern Colorado. He received Public Relations Society of America accreditation in 1996.

Away from work, he enjoys traveling, cooking, camping, hunting for bargains at flea markets, and "raising two great kids—Alexandra, 10, and Michael, 7.

(Inside Connections will feature a PUC employee each edition as selected by PUC section chiefs.)

DORA under leadership of O'Donnell

The Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) has operated under a new executive director since January.

Richard F. O'Donnell was chosen by Governor Bill Owens to replace **M. Michael Cooke**, after Cooke was appointed executive director of the Department of Revenue. In addition to his duties at DORA, O'Donnell also serves as director of the Governor's Office of Policy and Initiatives, a post he has held since 1999.

"It's been an honor to serve in

Governor Owens' administration for the first four years and I am looking forward to these new challenges," O'Donnell said of his DORA appointment. "I appreciate the governor's confidence and assure you that I'll be working very hard to serve our state's consumers and businesses."

DORA is responsible for the regulation of more than 450,000 licensed professionals and business entities in Colorado. Divisions within DORA include Banking, Civil Rights, Insurance, Real Estate and the Public Utilities Commission.

CONNECTIONS is the newsletter of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. It covers Commission cases and actions of importance to consumers, utilities, consumer groups and decision makers.

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PUC considers settlement resolving Xcel rate case

Fuel cost adjustment increases electric bill beginning first of May

New electric rates allowing Xcel Energy to recover an additional \$93 million in fuel costs for generation and purchased power in 2003 were implemented on May 1, while the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) considered other parts of a comprehensive rate case settlement that likely will take effect on July 1.

The PUC on April 28 approved an

application by Xcel to increase the energy cost adjustment two months early to lessen the monthly impact to customers. The change on May 1 increased the monthly electric bills of typical residential customers by \$3.35 per month and small commercial customers by \$6.79 per month.

The energy cost adjustment, which provides for a dollar-for-dollar recovery of the fuel costs used to generate electricity along with purchased power expenses, was primarily a result of rising natural gas costs. Natural gas generation accounts for about 25 percent of Xcel's resource mix, and also accounts for a large majority of purchased power, which is 39 percent of the company's total.

The energy cost adjustment was part

of an overall rate case settlement filed April 4 after negotiations between Xcel, PUC staff, the Office of Consumer Counsel, certain large Xcel customers, the City and County of Denver, the Land and Water Fund, the Governor's Office of Energy Management and Conservation, the Colorado Energy Assistance Foundation, the Federal Executive Agencies, and the Colorado Business Alliance for Cooperative Utility Practices.

Apart from the energy cost increase, the settlement calls for an annual reduction in the base rates for electric customers by \$230,000, natural gas customers by \$33.3 million, and steam customers by \$26,000. The reductions are mostly due to a lower allowable rate of return for the company, lower deprecia-

tion rates, and more costs assigned to non-regulated products and services.

If approved by the PUC, the base rate reductions would result in a decrease of 3 cents per month for typical residential electric customers and 5 cents per month for small commercial customers. Residential natural gas customers would see a decrease of \$1.74 per month and small commercial customers' gas bills would drop \$5.55 per month. Under the settlement, these changes would go into effect on July 1.

Once both are in effect, the net impact of the energy cost increase and the base rate decrease for customers receiving both natural gas and electric service from the company would be a \$1.58 increase per month for residential customers and a \$1.19 increase per month for small commercial customers.

The settlement also provides Xcel Energy the ability to continue its electricity trading operations and for the sharing of trading profits between customers and the company. Xcel's customers are protected from paying the costs of energy trading losses.

Agreement filed in Aquila electric rate case

Parties have reached a comprehensive settlement in the Aquila Networks electric rate case filed last fall.

A proposed agreement was submitted to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on April 18. It was signed by Aquila, PUC staff, the Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel, and several governmental and industrial customers who participated in settlement negotiations.

If approved by the PUC, the agreement would grant a \$16 million annual revenue increase to the company, raising customer rates by approximately 15.6 percent. The company had originally asked for a \$23.4 million increase.

Under the settlement, residential customers using an average of 579 kilowatt hours (kwh) per month will see an increase of \$6.83 on their monthly bills, while small business customers using 5,520 kwh per month will see an increase of \$49 per month.

The PUC is expected to hold a hearing on the settlement agreement in mid-May. If the settlement is approved, the new rates are likely to go into effect on June 13 as a 15.6 percent across-the-board increase for all customer classes. The company intends to file a phase II case, a revenue-neutral filing which determines any changes to how rates are spread

among the various customer classes, no later than Oct. 31.

The settlement agreement also calls for the company to begin collaborative discussions with PUC staff, the OCC and other interested parties to develop a quality-of-service plan for Aquila's electric operations in Colorado. Aquila will file a quality-of-service plan with the PUC for approval no later than Jan. 31, 2004.

Aquila serves about 85,000 customers in more than 21 communities in southern Colorado, including the cities of Pueblo, Canon City, Rocky Ford and Florence. Prior to the current case, it's last general rate case was filed in 1983.

Natural gas prices on upward swing

Xcel, other utilities allowed to pass on increased gas costs

After an 18-month period of lower heating bills, natural gas customers in Colorado are seeing an upward swing in prices.

Several Colorado utilities, including Xcel Energy, recently were allowed increases in gas cost adjustments (GCAs) to reflect higher current and forecasted wholesale costs for natural gas. Wholesale gas prices, which are deregulated, are passed on to customers on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Utilities do not make any profit from the gas commodity itself.

On March 21, Xcel implemented a \$95.6 million gas cost increase to be in effect through September of 2003. For typical residential customers using 38 therms a month, the increase added \$9.82, or 43 percent, to their monthly gas bill. Small business customer bills are paying \$45.48 more per month, or 58.4 percent, based on an average monthly use of 176 therms per month.

Under current rules, Xcel is required to file an annual gas cost adjustment in September of each year, although the company currently is asking the Public Utilities Commission to approve GCA filings on a monthly basis to mitigate large upward or downward swings in prices.

Since the winter of 2000-2001, when natural gas prices hit record highs, Xcel has passed on to consumers nearly \$715 million in gas cost decreases. However, gas prices have remained above forecasted levels in 2003 primarily because of cold weather in the northeast, lower national natural gas storage levels, and new pipeline capacity out of the Rocky Mountain region, resulting in the need to the recent upward adjustment.

Xcel Energy is not the only Colorado gas utility to implement recent gas cost increases. Atmos Energy requested adjustments for March and April that increased customer gas bills 34-47 percent in its four service territories. Colorado Natural Gas Company also implemented a gas cost adjustment in January.

Lake Durango implements strict drought plan

In response to Colorado's drought conditions, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in April allowed Lake Durango Water Company to implement a plan that restricts outdoor watering to one day a week and sets escalating rates as a customer's water usage goes up.

The water curtailment plan and conservation rates, effective April 22, are similar to those imposed by Lake Durango last summer.

Lake Durango, one of three small, investor-owned water utilities in the state regulated by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), provides water to about 450 retail customers and several water districts serving an additional 575 customers on the western outskirts of Durango.

Under the tiered rate plan, customers using between 0-6,000 gallons per month pay \$3.57 for every 1,000 gallons used.

Between 6,000-12,000 gallons the rate is \$6 per 1,000 gallons; between 12,000-24,000 the rate is \$8 per 1,000 gallons; and above 24,000 gallons the rate is \$10 per 1,000 gallons.

Lake Durango currently has implemented stage 2 of its four-stage water curtailment plan. Stage two limits customers' outside watering to two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening one day a week. Hoses can be used with a sprinkler control device, but must not be left unattended. No washing of vehicles is allowed, and no filling of swimming pools, ponds, waterfalls or other landscaping ponds is allowed.

The company also has a pending rate case before the PUC that would increase its base water rates and double the conservation rate that the company's biggest water users would pay.

Under the proposal, the rate for the minimum usage for residential

customers would increase from \$3.57 to \$3.87 for every 1,000 gallons, and the rate for usage above 24,000 gallons per month would double—from \$10 to \$20 per 1,000 gallons. Rates for the other usage categories would not change. For bulk sales customers like the water districts, the rate would increase from \$2.90 to \$3.20 per 1,000 gallons.

The proposal also increases the monthly service charge for both retail and bulk customers. The base fee, which is applied regardless of usage, would increase from \$5.50 per month to \$29.47 per month for residential customers. The fee for bulk sales customers would depend on the size of the meter and the number of meters being served.

Parties to the proceeding have begun negotiations to try to reach a settlement on the issues in the case. If a settlement is not reached, hearings would likely be held this summer.

PUC rejects proposal to add new monthly telephone fee

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission rejected an application filed by telephone companies to reduce intrastate access charges while adding a new monthly fee to local telephone bills.

The PUC ruled in January that the proposal to lower per-minute access charges to long-distance companies and make up the revenue with a \$1.47 per month fee on all local telephone lines was a violation of the residential rate cap under current Colorado telecommunications law.

The rate cap prohibits local residential telephone rates from rising, except in certain circumstances, above levels in place at the time Colorado's law opening the local market to competition was passed in 1995.

In dismissing the application on its own motion, the PUC said telephone customers' access to long-distance service is a part of the definition of basic local

service, and already included in the monthly charge for local service. The PUC said the proposed monthly fee amounted to a shift in the payment of access charges from long-distance companies to customers and was a violation of the rate cap.

The joint application was filed by AT&T, WorldCom, Sprint, Qwest and the Colorado Telecommunications Association on behalf of 27 local independent phone companies.

The application proposed to reduce the charges that long-distance companies pay to the local companies to originate and/or terminate long-distance calls over their local networks—also called access charges. Access charges are based on per-minutes of usage.

Under the proposed plan, access charges for intrastate long-distance calls would have been reduced to the same

rates that Qwest charges for interstate calls. Since this would have resulted in less revenue for Qwest and the other local carriers, the application proposed to offset that revenue loss by establishing an "intrastate subscriber line charge" on each residential and business line in the state.

The companies estimated that the new intrastate subscriber line charge (ISLC) would have been \$1.47 per month. It would have appeared on customers' local telephone bills, similar to the "federal access charge" or "federal subscriber line charge" that already appears on local bills.

Despite a reduction in the access charges paid to local companies, the proposal would have specifically prohibited the PUC from requiring that long-distance companies reduce their rates in any amount to reflect the savings.

Legislature expands No-Call program

Wireless subscribers can put phone numbers on list beginning June 1

Wireless telephone subscribers hoping to avoid telemarketing solicitations will be able to add their phone numbers to Colorado's No Call List beginning June 1.

The Colorado Legislature this session approved a bill expanding the state's No-Call program to include wireless phone numbers along with residential phone customers. Governor Bill Owens signed the measure into law in March.

The bill directed the Public Utilities

Commission to amend its rules to incorporate wireless telephone numbers into the program "as soon as practicable." Based on discussions with the designated agent, e-Infodata.com, which maintains the program, registration for wireless customers is expected to begin June 1, with telemarketers receiving the first list that includes wireless numbers on July 10.

The bill also authorizes the designated agent to provide data from the Colorado No-Call List for inclusion in a national No-Call database, once a national list is established. That will eliminate the need for customers who have signed up for Colorado's list to re-register their numbers on the national list.

More than 1.1 million residential customers have placed their numbers on the Colorado No-Call List since it became operational a year ago. The initial law did not include wireless phones, but lawmakers moved to include them this year,

citing a growing number of telemarketing calls to wireless phones.

Under the No-Call program, residential and wireless telephone subscribers can place their telephone numbers on the No-Call List at no charge. Telemarketers who place three or more calls a month to numbers on the No-Call List may be subject to enforcement actions brought by the Attorney General's Office.

Certain calls are exempted from the No-Call provisions, such as calls placed on behalf of any person or entity with whom the subscriber has an existing business relationship, calls made on behalf of charitable organizations, and political calls.

Consumers may file complaints about possible violations of the No-Call law by either calling toll-free 1-888-600-5688 or by going on-line at www.ColoradoNoCall.com. To register a phone number, go to the web site, or call 1-888-249-9097.

National No-Call list to automatically take numbers on state lists

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) will launch a national No-Call List this summer aimed at blocking unwanted telemarketing calls. Telephone numbers on the Colorado No-Call List will automatically be on the national list. No action need be taken by Colorado No-Call subscribers.

In states that do not have No-Call lists, telephone subscribers will be able to sign up for the FTC list via the Internet beginning July 1. The FTC also will establish a toll-free number available first on the West Coast and spreading across the country over an eight-week period until it is available nationwide by the end of August.

Beginning in September, telemarketers will be required to check the list every three months and remove from their marketing lists the numbers of people who do not want to be called. Beginning in October, companies who call numbers on the No-Call list could be fined up to \$11,000 for each violation.

Officials from the Colorado Public Utilities Commission and the Colorado Attorney General's Office have been working with FTC officials to determine how the national list will mesh with state No-Call laws.

Garfield County wider local calling in place

The local calling area for several communities in Garfield County in western Colorado was expanded beginning April 30.

Customers in Glenwood Springs, Rifle, Carbondale, New Castle, Parachute and Silt no longer have to pay long distance charges when calling between any of those communities. Previously, customers in those communities had local calling to some of the other exchanges, but not all of them.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved late last year an agreement reached between the cities, Qwest and PUC staff. The PUC found that a "community of interest" existed between the Garfield County communities. Prior to the expansion, many customers within Garfield County had to make long-distance calls to reach their governmental, primary business, school and certain medical services.

Following a four-month period of implementation by Qwest, Garfield County customers were able to start making local calls to the following prefixes in the 970 area code on April 30: 704, 963 (Carbondale); 384, 928, 945, 947 (Glenwood Springs); 984 (New Castle); 285 (Parachute); 625 (Rifle); and 876 (Silt).

Two other applications for expanded local calling currently are being considered by the PUC. Strasburg Telephone Company and Eastern Slope Rural Telephone Association, both serving customers along the I-70 corridor east of Denver, have filed proposals to expand local calling in their territories to include the Denver metro area.

Strasburg, which serves the town of Strasburg and surrounding areas, has proposed a mandatory calling plan for all of its customers for local calling into the Denver metro area. Strasburg proposes to

increase rates by \$7.95 per month for the expansion, upping the residential monthly rate to \$24.35 per month and the business rate to \$34.35 per month.

Eastern Slope, which serves 10 exchanges in eastern Colorado, is proposing to expand local calling only for its Bennett exchange. The company has proposed an optional calling plan for Bennett customers which would provide unlimited local calling into the Denver metro area for \$26.86 per month for residential customers and \$29.53 per month for business customers. Bennett customers who wish to retain their current calling area would continue to pay \$13.36 per month for residential service and \$16.03 for business service.

Hearings are likely to be held in both applications later this summer to determine if the applications meet the "community of interest" standards in the PUC's rules for local calling areas.

Basic service unaltered

After conducting its triennial review as required by law, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has decided not to change the definition of basic telephone service at this time.

Currently, the definition includes: a single-party line; touch tone; access to long-distance, 9-1-1, operator services and directory assistance; customer billing; white page directory listing; a local calling area that reflects a community of interest; and fax and data transmission capability within the voice grade bandwidth. Those services must be provided to all local phone customers at the basic monthly rate, with no additional charge.

The PUC sought comment last year on any changes or modifications that should be made to the definition of basic service. None of the parties submitting comments recommended that the definition of basic service be expanded at this time.

Starting Point

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basis. I truly appreciate the efforts of each and every one of you. And it's nice to know that those efforts do not go unnoticed by others, too.

Qwest to refund \$2.17 million for 2002 results

Local telephone customers of Qwest Corporation will receive a credit on their bills next month as part of a \$2.17 million refund by Qwest for its service quality performance in 2002.


The refund will amount to 93 cents for each of Qwest's approximately 2.3 million residential and business lines. The credits will appear on customer bills beginning June 1.

A five-year regulatory plan approved by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission in 1999 requires Qwest to meet certain service standards or provide up to \$15 million a year in auto-

matic customer bill credits. The standards measure the company's performance in the areas of timely provisioning of service, speed of repair, call completion and telephone access to Qwest's business offices.

Based on results filed by Qwest on April 1 and reviewed by PUC staff, the company owes \$2,165,666 for its performance in 2002. The company was penalized the maximum \$2 million amount for missing standards for clearing out-of-service trouble reports within 24 hours. It also must give money back for missing standards in the network reliability and call completion category, and the time it takes to answer calls to its sales office. The company met the standards for filling customer service requests in a timely manner and answering calls to its repair center within 60 seconds.

This is the fourth service quality filing made under the terms of the 1999 agreement. For the last nine months of 1999, Qwest refunded \$7.4 million to customers; for its performance in 2000, Qwest credited \$11.2 million back to customers; and \$4.1 million was refunded for performance in 2001.


Connections
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