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State Senate Votes to Support Meaningful Telecom Reform

Assembly Leadership Stands in the Way of Competition and Consumer Choice

MADISON – On Wednesday, March 12, 2008, the Wisconsin State Senate overwhelmingly voted to support Senate Bill 285, a telecommunications reform proposal needed to level the playing field for both incumbent local phone companies and competitive providers. Unfortunately, due to the opposition of a single telecommunications provider, the leadership in the State Assembly decided to prevent a vote on the bill.

The Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA) would like to express their sincere appreciation to Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee), Chair of the Senate Commerce, Utilities and Rail Committee, Senate Majority Leader Russ Decker (D-Weston) and the entire State Senate for their leadership on this issue and for supporting this pro-competition, pro-investment, pro-consumer legislation.

WSTA would also like to thank Rep. Phil Montgomery (R-Ashwaubenon), Chair of the Assembly Energy and Utilities Committee, and Public Service Commission Chairman Dan Ebert, for the important role they played in developing this compromise proposal arrived at only after months of careful and thoughtful negotiations.

According to Bill Esbeck, WSTA Executive Director, Senate Bill 285 would have allowed Wisconsin's telecommunications utilities to adapt quickly in an ever increasing competitive marketplace where "bundles" and "packages" of services are the norm. In exchange for this additional flexibility, competitive providers would have gained easier access and quicker entry into all Wisconsin markets.

“With the array of current competitive options, new products and service offerings continuing to enter the market and the explosion of wireless competition, there is a competitive environment that was not imagined the last time the telecommunications statutes were updated in 1994,” said Esbeck. “It is very unfortunate that leaders in the State Assembly put the objections of a single company ahead of a pro-competition, pro-investment, and pro-consumer initiative supported by industry, organized labor, and regulators.”

WSTA looks forward to working with Sen. Plale, Rep. Montgomery and other likeminded lawmakers in the future to update Wisconsin’s outdated telecommunications statutes. The winners will ultimately be Wisconsin consumers who will see the benefits of competition from all of their telecommunications providers – both new ones and familiar ones.

WSTA is a Madison-based trade organization representing more than 75 of Wisconsin’s local telephone companies, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and wireless carriers.

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