

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE  
Transcriber's Office

February 11, 1999 LB 514

interest in this because I know we all realize that virtually all of our constituents are going to be impacted in the very near future, and have been impacted by the advent of deregulation in the telecommunications industry. It's an extremely important area of policy and I'm going to...I'm going to be rather brief in my closing, but just to remind ourselves what the bill does at this point. It does remove the important sunset date for the state Universal Service Fund so that it can continue indefinitely after June 30th of this year, which creates the pool of money to help us maintain the high penetration of affordable telephone usage in this state. It clarifies the powers of the Universal Service Fund with respect to regulating access charges, the order that has been entered by the commission has a goal of lowering the long distance charges substantially. It also has a rate balancing effect for all of the companies. I appreciated Senator Bruning's insight with respect to the workings of the commission, the heavy work load that they are now experiencing versus just a short two or three years ago. So that is why the committee, I think, decided we need to give the commission the tools to do the job. We hope that we've done that. We've encouraged them to certainly use their budgetary authority to fill their staff with qualified attorneys and people. I think they've done that, and so now it's up to them to apply the law fairly and to do a good job of looking after the public interest in their position. Lastly, I want to make one comment, after the Public Service Commission entered their order and had a significant number of steps set out with respect to implementation of the Universal Service Fund, you all may have heard some of the uproar from the telemarketers about applying this Universal Service Fund tax to the interstate calls, and the commission had another hearing. They removed the tax on the interstate calls at this point, but they...the order leaves the door open until we see what the federal people do with respect to the interstate tax. It is my hope, and I think it would behoove our state for us to encourage our federal representatives to take action on the federal level with respect to the federal interstate charge for the Universal Service Fund. If we had a federal...a federal universal tax and that tax was levied throughout the country in an even capacity and then used in those states that have the high cost and the difficulty in raising funds to offset those high costs, that would eliminate the shopping that will go on from telemarketing