

Telecom Topics

Communications Connectivity: The New Debate

(NAPSA)—Internet access and the ability to reach anyone, anywhere, via phone, e-mail or exciting new technologies such as video mail is something many of us take for granted nowadays.

But some experts say a critical resource that helps ensure these modern conveniences are available to—and affordable for—Americans is under attack, and consumers could suffer as a result.

In the early days of telephony, Congress recognized that universal access to communications services would be vital to the nation's growth and prosperity. It established a policy of "universal service," which ensured the availability of comparable telephone service at comparable prices for all Americans. The Universal Service Fund (USF) was created to help make this a reality.

USF support enables phone companies to build and maintain the infrastructure needed to connect all Americans to the network. Analysts say it's the main reason why, today, 94 percent of American households receive telephone service. USF is also why everyone's phone service costs about the same—whether you live on a remote farm or in a high-rise apartment building in a bustling urban metropolis. In addition, the fund helps keep businesses, organizations and schools connected, and that helps create jobs, raise the tax base and drive local economies across the country.

Congress and the Federal Communications Commission continue to focus on updating the nation's communications laws. Some are calling for the elimination or reduction of USF support—a move



The Universal Service Fund helps make modern connectivity possible for all Americans.

many say would result in skyrocketing telephone bills and threaten the quality of communications service to rural communities.

But regardless of how they say it should change, most people in Washington agree that the universal service program needs to be updated. While the USF has accomplished the job of delivering Americans essential voice communications, the next step is the "high-tech connect"—expanding broadband-capable networks so that all Americans have access to the opportunities provided by advanced communications technologies.

Proponents of the high-tech connect say USF support is critical to ensuring that phone companies are able to provide quality, affordable communications services to everyone, everywhere. Contact your congressional representative to learn more and to tell him or her your views on preserving the Universal Service Fund. For additional information, visit www.ntca.org.