

NEWS RELEASE

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers® AFL-CIO-CLC

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IBEW Presses Call for Service, Jobs and Growth in Telecommunications

(Washington, D.C.) - The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers today publicly urged the Federal Communications Commission to leave the states in charge of determining the wholesale line rates that regional telecommunications companies can charge their competitors.

"The FCC should not cut off the potential for growth, investment and job opportunities in the reeling telecommunications industry," said IBEW International President Edwin D. Hill. He noted that the promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, once hailed as the "greatest jobs bill of the decade," has not been realized. "The industry is hurting and FCC intervention would make it worse," Hill said.

The FCC is currently considering new rules that would allow the regional companies to charge higher rates and limit access to their lines.

"We oppose the imposition of a one-size-fits-all approach on this issue," Hill said. "State regulators have the best grasp of local conditions that would affect the setting of wholesale line rates, and they should be allowed to continue to make decisions in the best interest of consumers, workers and communities."

Hill notes that service to consumers in the telecommunications industry largely depends on a skilled work force to install and maintain the networks that power the industry. In the past two years, however, approximately 485,000 telecommunications jobs have been lost. The recent layoffs at several regional Bell companies - even as profits and executive compensation have been robust -- threaten service to consumers and strain an already thin work force.

"In the current atmosphere, we believe that federal intervention to choke off competition for local service would be a disaster. Displaced workers and those seeking to enter the industry need more job opportunities, not fewer. Allowing states to set reasonable wholesale rates for new entrants into the local markets will help further that goal and be more in spirit with the intent of the 1996 Act," said Hill. "States where competition for local service has been allowed to proceed are seeing an increase in investment and jobs, and that's what we need for the long term good of the industry."

Founded in 1891, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers is a 775,000-member union representing workers in construction, utilities, telecommunications, manufacturing, broadcasting, railroads and government.

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