



NEWS RELEASE

CenturyTel Chairman Urges Senate Commerce Committee to Protect Consumers' Rights to Affordable, Reliable Communications Services

2004-02-24

MONROE, La.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Feb. 24, 2004--CenturyTel, Inc. (NYSE:CTL) chairman and CEO Glen Post addressed the Commerce Committee of the United States Senate today to discuss regulation of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and its impact on the communications industry. Representing the local telephone industry on a panel testifying before the committee, Post provided a unique perspective of the impact VoIP policy could have on consumers in rural communities and smaller cities. CenturyTel provides communications services to rural markets and smaller cities throughout 22 states.

"How you and the FCC proceed has critical implications to the long-term future of this nation's telecommunications infrastructure and our ability to keep pace with the rest of the world," Post said. "While crafting new policies needed today, we should seek to avoid unintended negative consequences for consumers of tomorrow as we open this new chapter in telecommunications history."

In recent months, the communications industry and key policymakers have been debating the proper regulatory treatment of VoIP. In mid-February, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) initiated a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to determine how or if VoIP is to be regulated. Issues include whether Internet telephony should be regulated as a telecommunications service or an information service and whether such regulation, if any, should come from the states or the FCC. Also at issue is the maintenance and modernization of the public switched network, and the preservation of the Universal Service Fund (USF).

Post asked the committee to require VoIP providers to properly compensate other telephone companies for carrying VoIP traffic. He stressed that VoIP providers should pay for use of the public switched telephone network needed to originate and terminate their calls, and should contribute to the USF which ensures all Americans have

access to affordable communications services.

CenturyTel is utilizing VoIP technology today and believes it will provide benefits for consumers in the future. Post asked lawmakers to take a balanced approach and evaluate VoIP in the full context of competition, universal service, public safety and intercarrier compensation. He urged the senators to ensure public interest standards such as 911, homeland security directives and access for persons with disabilities be required of new providers.

Post also pointed out possible inequities in the present system that could undermine the public interest. "VoIP service providers cannot deliver their services without relying on someone else's network," Post said. "Their ability to operate depends on the investments companies like CenturyTel have made to bring broadband connections to rural America. These new providers are not concerning themselves with the capital-intensive task of building and maintaining a broadband-capable network that universally serves all customers."

According to Post, if VoIP service providers are allowed to continue to use the public switched network without paying for it, the nation's telecommunications infrastructure will be in jeopardy.

"VoIP is an exciting technology that highlights the need for a broad revisiting of the nation's communications policy," Post said. "We need to move beyond government-managed competition that rewards those who make no network investment while handcuffing those who do."

Post was part of a panel that included representatives from Vonage, Time Warner and the Georgia Public Utilities Commission. The committee also heard testimony from FCC Chairman Michael Powell and Senator Lamar Alexander.

CenturyTel, Inc. provides communications services including local, long distance, Internet access and data services to more than 3 million customers in 22 states. The company, headquartered in Monroe, Louisiana, is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol CTL, and is included in the S&P 500 Index. CenturyTel is the 8th largest local exchange telephone company, based on access lines, in the United States. Visit CenturyTel at www.centurytel.com.

CONTACT: CenturyTel, Inc.

Media:

Patricia Cameron, 318-388-9674

patricia.cameron@centurytel.com

or

Investors:

Tony Davis, 318-388-9525

tony.davis@centurytel.com

SOURCE: CenturyTel, Inc.