

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2011

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

*WCB
USF - Rural
Healthcare
4/08*

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

As you are aware, Alaska is facing great challenges, especially in its most rural areas. In Alaska, due to severe geographical and logistical hurdles, most projects cost more and take longer to implement. Such was the case for the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) and General Communication, Inc. (GCI) as they endeavored to expand YKHC's telemedicine infrastructure in late 2008 and early 2009. Unfortunately, due to the unforgiving climate in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, the rollout of YKHC's and GCI's new telemedicine infrastructure was delayed. Consequently, we would like to encourage you to promptly act on YKHC's and GCI's requests to review the Universal Service Administrative Company's (USAC) denial of nearly \$1.6 million in reimbursements for rural health care telecommunications services.

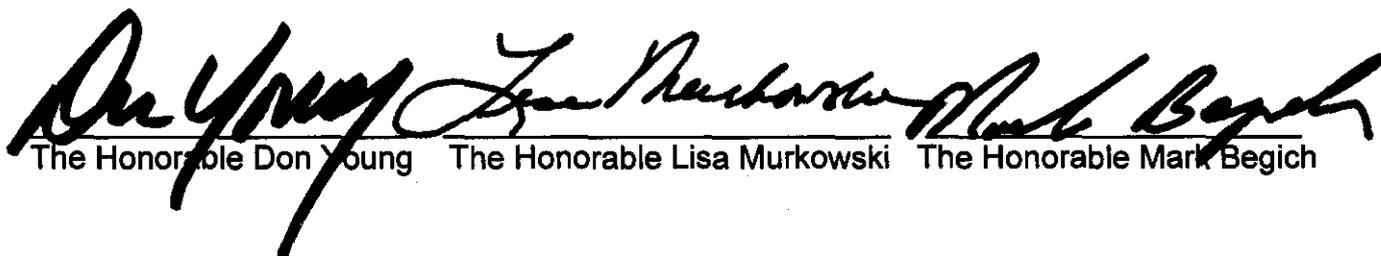
YKHC is an Alaska Native regional health care provider which is the sole source of health care to nearly 47 rural Alaskan communities. Since most of these communities do not have resident doctors or nurses, most diagnostic and treatment support comes from doctors in Bethel, Alaska, a regional hub of about 5,000 residents and home to the only hospital in the area. YKHC's telemedicine services-- which include everything from the reviewing EKG's of chest pain patients to providing professional counseling to Alaska Native soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan -- are leading examples of the benefits advanced broadband networks can bring to rural America. Without these services, patients in these small villages would either go untreated or, in many cases, be forced to charter air service to the nearest doctor, at the cost of thousands of dollars.

In 2008, YKHC began to upgrade and expand its telemedicine infrastructure. This project required the installation of higher-capacity, terrestrial broadband and the installation of high definition video monitors. While the broadband linkages were installed on time, the installation of the high definition monitors was unavoidably delayed. This delay occurred because of YKHC's inability to locate an electrician who was willing to go the villages and because severe weather conditions often prevented flights into these villages. Ultimately, YKHC was only able to solve the problem by recruiting electricians in the military services to install the electrical connections during their Arctic Care training exercises. Even these electricians were hampered by bad weather that continually limited and delayed their travel.

In 2010, nearly two years after services were rendered, USAC reviewed YKHC's contracts and declined to fund the full service provided by GCI to YKHC for the time before the high definition monitors were installed. While we do not take a position on the merits of YKHC's and GCI's requests for review, we hope the Commission strongly considers the unique challenges encountered when installing and delivering advanced communications services and applications in rural Alaska. Overall, not only does weather severely shorten the Alaskan construction season, but also these remote areas lack roads and other infrastructure commonly found throughout much of the Lower 48.

Thank you in advance for expeditiously reviewing this matter and for taking into account the unique challenges of serving rural Alaska. We await your prompt response.

Sincerely,



The Honorable Don Young The Honorable Lisa Murkowski The Honorable Mark Begich