

THE REVITALIZATION OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION IN RURAL AMERICA ACT OF 1992

General:

During the preceding decade of the 1980's, rural communities witnessed an exodus of over 5 million residents to urban and suburban areas of the nation. It has become increasingly clear that rural parts of the country must adopt aggressive strategies to strengthen rural communities and enhance the quality of life for its citizens into the 21st century.

Studies by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Technology Assessment, and the Aspen Institute all identify advanced telecommunications systems as the linchpin for a vigorous future for rural America. The Revitalization of Health and Education in Rural America Act of 1992 incorporates these recommendations into viable strategies to improve health care and educational services for rural citizens. By linking up hospitals and schools through advanced telecommunications technology, vast geographic distances are instantly reduced. With the proper infrastructure in place, up-to-date telecommunications services will facilitate endless opportunities for improving the quality of life in remote areas. This comprehensive legislation is the critical first step in forging a partnership with urban communities to create an economically sound and technologically advanced America for generations to come.

Improvement of Health Care and Educational Services in Rural Areas through the Implementation of Interactive Telecommunications Systems.

The bill sets up a program through the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) for providing grants to qualified health and education

consortia to assist them in obtaining access to modern interactive telecommunications systems through the public switched network. A qualified health care consortium is made up of a large health facility linked up with at least three rural hospitals, clinics, community health centers, migrant health centers or local health departments. A qualified education consortium is a consortium of not less than three educational institutions accredited by the State.

In order for a State's potential grantees to participate in the program, the Governor of that State must submit a plan to the Administrator of REA to upgrade and modernize its rural telecommunications infrastructure and improve the use of telecommunications, computer networks, and related advanced technologies within ten years. An interested health or education consortium would then submit a plan to REA to provide more comprehensive health or education services through interactive telecommunications systems in order to receive a grant. The bill sets out de minimis standards for the Governor to meet in order for the State to have eligible grant applicants.

In selecting the grantees, the Administrator of REA must prioritize those grants which have the greatest likelihood of success, participation of the local telecommunications exchange carrier, and support of the local community. The grants are capped at \$1.5 million per consortium and must be used for the purpose of improving health care and education as provided under the bill through a qualified health or education consortium. As an incentive for local telephone exchange carriers to upgrade existing facilities, a telephone borrower can receive a low interest loan through REA if the State in which the borrower does business has a qualified plan submitted by the Governor of that State to REA.

Grants to improve health care in rural areas can be used for consultations between health care providers; transmitting and analyzing x-rays, lab slides and other images; and providing continuing education programs for physicians. Grants to improve education in rural areas can be used for the development of innovative education programs and expanding curriculum offerings; providing continuing education to all members of the community; providing the means for libraries of educational institutions and public libraries to share resources; provide public access to State and national data bases; and conducting town meetings for educational purposes.

The bill authorizes \$30 million to be appropriated for health care consortia and \$20 million to be appropriated for education consortia. The legislation amends the Rural Electrification Act in order to provide Section 305(b) insured 4% loans to telephone companies that participate in the Governor's plan. The Act is further amended to provide for the rural population requirement under the

telephone loan program of REA to be increased from 1,500 to 10,000 in order to enhance participation by those local telephone exchange carriers not currently upgrading in their service areas. There is a "Sense of the Congress" provision stating that those local telephone exchange carriers interested in upgrading their service territory with REA loans, but are reluctant due to the lien requirements, may set up a subsidiary for that exchange in order to borrow from REA.

102^D CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. _____

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. ENGLISH introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To establish a grant program to improve the provision of health care services and educational services in rural areas by enabling providers of such services to obtain access to modern interactive telecommunications systems, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the "Revitalization of
5 Health and Education in Rural America Act of 1992".

1 SEC. 2. GRANTS TO ENABLE PROVIDERS OF HEALTH CARE
2 AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN RURAL
3 AREAS TO IMPLEMENT INTERACTIVE TELE-
4 COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS.

5 (a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds that—

- 6 (1) interactive telecommunications systems hold
7 the potential to alleviate many of the problems rural
8 Americans face in obtaining access to adequate
9 health care and expanded educational services; and
10 (2) access to such systems by providers of
11 health care services and educational institutions in
12 rural areas would greatly increase their ability to
13 provide more comprehensive health care and edu-
14 cation to rural, underserved populations.

15 (b) GRANT PROGRAM.—Subtitle D of title XXXIII of
16 the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of
17 1990 is amended by adding at the end the following:

18 “CHAPTER 3—IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH CARE
19 SERVICES AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
20 THROUGH TELECOMMUNICATIONS

21 “SEC. 2338. GRANT PROGRAM.

22 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Administrator of the
23 Rural Electrification Administration (in this chapter re-
24 ferred to as the ‘Administrator’) shall establish a program
25 for providing grants to any qualified consortium to assist
26 the consortium in obtaining access to modern interactive

1 telecommunications systems through the public switched
2 network.

3 “(b) DEFINITIONS.—

4 “(1) QUALIFIED CONSORTIUM.—As used in this
5 chapter, the term ‘qualified consortium’ means a
6 consortium which—

7 “(A) provides health care services or edu-
8 cational services in a rural area of a qualified
9 State; and

10 “(B) is composed of—

11 “(i) a tertiary care facility, rural re-
12 ferral center, or medical teaching institu-
13 tion, or an educational institution accred-
14 ited by the State;

15 “(ii) any number of institutions that
16 provide health care services or educational
17 services; and

18 “(iii)(I) in the case of a consortium
19 seeking a grant under this chapter to im-
20 prove health care services, not less than 3
21 rural hospitals, clinics, community health
22 centers, migrant health centers, local
23 health departments, or similar facilities; or

24 “(II) in the case of a consortium seek-
25 ing a grant under this chapter to improve

1 educational services, not less than 3 edu-
2 cational institutions accredited by the
3 State.

4 “(2) QUALIFIED STATE.—The term ‘qualified
5 State’ means a State which has adopted, within 1
6 year after the date final regulations are prescribed
7 to carry out this chapter, a plan for the upgrading
8 and modernization of the rural telecommunications
9 infrastructure of the State which, among other
10 things—

11 “(A) provides for the elimination of party
12 line service in rural areas of the State;

13 “(B) encourages and improves the use of
14 telecommunications, computer networks, and
15 related advanced technologies to provide edu-
16 cational and medical benefits to people in rural
17 areas of the State;

18 “(C) provides for an enhancement in the
19 quality and availability of educational opportu-
20 nities for students in rural areas of the State;

21 “(D) provides for improvement in the qual-
22 ity of medical care provided, and access to med-
23 ical care afforded, to people in rural areas of
24 the State;

1 “(E) provides incentives for local telephone
2 exchange carriers to improve the quality of tele-
3 phone service and access to advanced tele-
4 communications services for subscribers in rural
5 areas of the State, including facsimile document
6 transmission, multifrequency tone signaling
7 services, interactive audio and video trans-
8 missions, voicemail services, and other tele-
9 communications services;

10 “(F) provides for the full participation of
11 rural areas in the modernization of the tele-
12 communications network through the implemen-
13 tation of joint coordinated network planning,
14 design, and cooperative implementation among
15 all local telephone exchange carriers in the pro-
16 vision of public switched network infrastructure
17 and services;

18 “(G) provides for the achievement, preser-
19 vation, and enhancement of universal service by
20 bringing reasonably priced, high-quality, ad-
21 vanced telecommunications network capabilities
22 to the people of the rural areas of the State, in-
23 cluding through the sharing of public switched
24 network infrastructure and functionality by
25 local telephone exchange carriers at the request

1 of local telephone exchange carriers lacking
2 economies of scale or scope to provide such in-
3 frastructure or functionality on their own;

4 “(H) provides for the achievement of such
5 goals within 10 years after the adoption of the
6 plan; and

7 “(I) does not alter the boundaries of any
8 local telephone exchange company franchised
9 service area designated or recognized by the
10 State, or the equivalent in the State.

11 “(3) RURAL AREA.—The term ‘rural area’ has
12 the meaning given such term in section 203(b) of
13 the Rural Electrification Act of 1936.

14 “(4) TELEPHONE SERVICE.—The term ‘tele-
15 phone service’ has the meaning given such term in
16 section 203(a) of the Rural Electrification Act of
17 1936.

18 “(c) SELECTION OF GRANT RECIPIENTS.—

19 “(1) APPLICATION REQUIREMENT.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Any qualified consor-
21 tium that provides services in a State and de-
22 sires to obtain a grant under this chapter shall
23 submit to a State agency designated by the
24 Governor of the State an application in such
25 form, containing such information and assur-

1 ance, and at such time, as the Administrator
2 may require.

3 “(B) CONTENTS OF APPLICATION.—The
4 application shall contain or be accompanied
5 by—

6 “(i) a copy of the State plan described
7 in subsection (b)(2);

8 “(ii) the plan of the applicant, for ob-
9 taining access to interactive telecommuni-
10 cations systems, which—

11 “(I) specifies, consistent with
12 subsection (f), the uses to be made of
13 such systems;

14 “(II) demonstrates that the sys-
15 tems will be capable of being readily
16 connected to the established public
17 switched network; and

18 “(III) is compatible with the
19 State plan; and

20 “(iii) a commitment by the State to
21 make a grant to the applicant in an
22 amount equal to 20 percent of the funds
23 required to carry out the plan of the appli-
24 cant, conditional upon a commitment by
25 the Administrator to make 1 or more

1 grants to the applicant under this chapter
2 in an amount equal to 80 percent of the
3 funds required to carry out the plan of the
4 applicant.

5 “(2) REVIEW AND COMMENT.—The State agen-
6 cy shall review the application and the applicant’s
7 plan and, after any revisions made by the applicant
8 are incorporated, transmit to the Administrator the
9 application and plans, and the comments of the
10 State agency.

11 “(3) SELECTION OF GRANTEES.—The Adminis-
12 trator shall—

13 “(A) review the applications and plans
14 transmitted pursuant to paragraph (2);

15 “(B) consider the comments of the State
16 agency with respect to the application; and

17 “(C) make grants in accordance with para-
18 graph (4) to each applicant therefor that com-
19 plies with the requirements of this chapter and
20 the regulations prescribed by the Administrator
21 to carry out this chapter.

22 “(4) PRIORITIES.—Priority for grants under
23 this chapter shall—

24 “(A) be accorded to applicants whose ap-
25 plications demonstrate—

1 “(i) the greatest likelihood of success-
2 fully and efficiently carrying out the activi-
3 ties described in subsection (f)(1);

4 “(ii) the participation of the local tele-
5 phone exchange carrier in providing and
6 operating the telecommunications trans-
7 mission facilities required by the plan; and

8 “(iii) unconditional financial support
9 from the local community; and

10 “(B) so as to ensure, to the extent pos-
11 sible, that various regions of the United States
12 benefit from the use of the grants.

13 “(d) MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF GRANT.—The amount of
14 each grant under this chapter shall not exceed \$1,500,000.

15 “(e) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS.—Grants to any
16 qualified consortium under this chapter shall be disbursed
17 over a period of not more than 3 years.

18 “(f) USE OF FUNDS.—

19 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Grants under this chapter
20 may be used to support the costs of activities involv-
21 ing the sending and receiving of information to im-
22 prove health care services or educational services in
23 rural areas, including—

24 “(A) in the case of grants to improve
25 health care services—

1 “(i) consultations between health care
2 providers;

3 “(ii) transmitting and analyzing x-
4 rays, lab slides, and other images;

5 “(iii) developing and evaluating auto-
6 mated claims processing, and transmitting
7 automated patient records; and

8 “(iv) developing innovative health pro-
9 fessions education programs;

10 “(B) in the case of grants to improve edu-
11 cational services—

12 “(i) developing innovative education
13 programs and expanding curriculum offer-
14 ings;

15 “(ii) providing continuing education to
16 all members of the community;

17 “(iii) providing the means for libraries
18 of educational institutions or public librar-
19 ies to share resources;

20 “(iv) providing the public with access
21 to State and national data bases;

22 “(v) conducting town meetings; and

23 “(vi) covering meetings of agencies of
24 State government; and

25 “(C) in all cases—

1 “(i) transmitting financial informa-
2 tion; and

3 “(ii) such other related activities as
4 the Administrator deems to be consistent
5 with the purposes of this chapter.

6 “(2) LIMITATION ON ACQUISITION OF INTER-
7 ACTIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT.—Not
8 more than 40 percent of the amount of any grant
9 made under this chapter may be used to acquire
10 interactive telecommunications end user equipment.

11 “(3) LIMITATION ON USE OF CONSULTANTS.—
12 Not more than 5 percent of the amount of any grant
13 made under this chapter may be used to employ or
14 contract with any consultant or similar person.

15 “(4) PROHIBITIONS.—Grants made under this
16 chapter may not be used, in whole or in part, to es-
17 tablish or operate a telecommunications network or
18 to provide any telecommunications service for hire.

19 “(g) LIMITATIONS ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPRO-
20 PRIATIONS.—

21 “(1) GRANTS TO IMPROVE RURAL HEALTH
22 CARE SERVICES.—For grants under this chapter to
23 improve health care services, there are authorized to
24 be appropriated to the Administrator not to exceed
25 \$30,000,000.

1 “(2) GRANTS TO IMPROVE RURAL EDU-
2 CATIONAL SERVICES.—For grants under this chap-
3 ter to improve educational services, there are author-
4 ized to be appropriated to the Administrator not to
5 exceed \$20,000,000.

6 “(3) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.—Sums appro-
7 priated pursuant to this subsection are authorized to
8 remain available until expended.”.

9 (c) REDUCTION IN INTEREST RATE ON INSURED
10 TELEPHONE LOANS FOR BORROWERS FROM STATES
11 WITH PLANS FOR UPGRADING RURAL TELECOMMUNI-
12 CATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE.—Section 305(b) of the Rural
13 Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 935(b)) is amended
14 by adding after and below the end the following:

15 “Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, an insured tele-
16 phone loan made under this section on or after the date
17 of the enactment of this sentence to an otherwise eligible
18 borrower therefor in any qualified State (as defined in sec-
19 tion 2338(b)(2) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation,
20 and Trade Act of 1990), which would (but for this sen-
21 tence) bear interest at more than 4 percent per annum,
22 shall bear interest at 4 percent per annum.”.

23 (d) ELIMINATION OF PREFERENCE FOR RURAL
24 TELEPHONE BANK LOANS FOR BORROWERS LOCATED IN
25 STATES WITH PLANS FOR UPGRADING RURAL TELE-

1 COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE.—Section 408(b)(2)
2 of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C.
3 948(b)(2)) is amended by inserting “which is not located
4 in a qualified State (as defined in section 2338(b)(2) of
5 the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of
6 1990)” after “any borrower”.

7 **SEC. 3. INCREASE IN LIMITATION ON POPULATION OF**
8 **RURAL AREAS FOR PURPOSES OF TELE-**
9 **PHONE LOANS.**

10 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 203(b) of the Rural Elec-
11 trification Act of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 924(b)) is amended by
12 striking “one thousand five hundred” and inserting
13 “10,000”.

14 (b) **CONFORMING AMENDMENT.**—Section 13 of such
15 Act (7 U.S.C. 913) is amended by inserting “(except in
16 title II)” before “shall be deemed to mean any area”.

17 **SEC. 4. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.**

18 It is the sense of the Congress that persons who are
19 eligible for telephone loans under the Rural Electrification
20 Act of 1936 and are interested in upgrading telecommuni-
21 cations in rural areas should obtain financial assistance
22 under such Act through a subsidiary in order to limit the
23 assets subject to the lien requirements of such Act.

1 **SEC. 5. REGULATIONS.**

2 Within 180 days after the date of the enactment of
3 this Act, the Administrator of the Rural Electrification
4 Administration and the Governor of the Rural Telephone
5 Bank shall prescribe such regulations as may be necessary
6 to carry out the amendments made by this Act.

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