Telecommunication

Universal Service and Competition

The overriding goal of this year's telecommunications legislation is to ensure that competition and quality telecommunications services are available to the entire state. Legislation was adopted which aims to provide a coordinated telecommunications infrastructure where public and private entities work together, in hopes of giving rural areas the same telecommunications services as urban areas (House Bill 99-1102). In addition, House Bill 99-1363 was intended to spur competition by requiring all carriers to provide service to residential and business customers alike. The goal was to have telecommunications providers investing throughout the state, and therefore strengthening competition in both urban and rural areas. The bill failed, but did result in an interim committee to study the issue (Senate Joint Resolution 99-049).

Regulation

There were several attempts at changing the regulation of the telecommunications industry in the state. The legislature was successful in changing how the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) handles certain aspects of telecommunications. Information about the quality of phone service, for example, phone outages, 911 outages, etc., will continue to be available at the PUC. However, the PUC is now prevented from providing any information on proprietary documents that the local exchange provider labels confidential. In addition, new advanced feature services introduced by carriers are now exempt from regulation (Senate Bill 99-057). On the other hand, an attempt to change the statute regulating the billing practices of long distance service providers was unsuccessful (Senate Bill 99-071). Also, an attempt to give the PUC the authority to directly assess fines against telecommunications providers who violate state regulations, instead of going to district court, was voted down, as was an attempt to expedite the process for resolving complaints and for penalizing providers who file frivolous complaints (Senate Bill 99-110).

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