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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEBRASKA PSC EFFORTS EXTEND 402 AREA CODE TO 2010

LINCOLN – The 402 Area Code of eastern Nebraska will gain more than four years from a previously forecasted exhaust date of the second quarter of 2006. New projections reported to the Nebraska Public Service Commission indicate that implementing mandatory pooling will move the potential 402 Area Code exhaust date to the third quarter of 2010. This extended exhaust date is a direct result of the Nebraska Public Service Commission petitioning for and receiving authority to mandate assignment of numbers to telephone companies in blocks of 1,000 rather than the traditional 10,000.

Nebraska was one of five states, including Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, and West Virginia that were authorized by the FCC to require telephone companies to return unused blocks of 1,000 numbers from their original allocation of 10,000 number blocks for assignment to other companies who need numbers in the same rate center. New number requests in pooling rate centers will only be parceled out in blocks of 1,000 rather than 10,000 when a full code was the only assignment option.

The Nebraska Commission has been exploring number conservation options since a May, 1999 forecast predicted that a new area code would be needed. One solution, an overlay, would add a second code on top of the existing 402 area and would require 10 digit dialing for all customers. Another common solution, a code split, would result in the current 402 Area Code being divided into two areas with one area keeping the 402 code and the other area would have a new code assigned. Under this scenario, it was expected that either Omaha or Lincoln would lose its currently assigned 402 Area Code.

Second District Commissioner Anne Boyle of Omaha has steadfastly resisted a new area code for Nebraska due to the cost to consumers, confusion and frustration among users, and the large number of unused numbers in the 402 Area Code due primarily to the assignment of numbers to carriers in blocks of 10,000. Until the FCC decision, Nebraska relied on cooperation from the state's largest local telephone companies – Qwest, Alltel, and Citizens – to return unused blocks of 1,000 numbers in an effort called voluntary "thousands-block number pooling".

Boyle said the FCC grant of Nebraska's application for mandatory pooling is significant. "It is a critical component of our efforts to extend the life of the 402 Area Code. Now, we will have time to thoughtfully investigate further conservation methods rather than simply reacting to annual exhaust dates." Other parts of the current number conservation plan include rate center consolidation, porting local numbers in the same service area, and reviewing current number assignments with the telecommunications industry.

First District Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln, who also has fought against implementing a new area code, said at the March 1 meeting of the Nebraska Commission, "The Federal Communications Commission has

finally reached a decision on something this Commission recognized two years ago. Now we expect the industry to step up to the plate and do its part.”

Current number assignment data reveals that Norfolk has approximately 40 blocks of 1,000 available within the present assignment that are not in service. Wahoo has more than three-fourths of their 20,000 numbers unassigned. Ponca has nearly 75 percent of its 10,000 numbers idle. Carroll could have as many as nine blocks of 1,000 unassigned and available to another carrier for the provision of service in Carroll.

Boyle said the importance of extending the life of the 402 Area Code is underscored by the constant emergence of new technology which might allow “Nebraska to avoid implementing a third area code in the state.”

The Federal Communications Commission’s decision to delegate authority to the PSC allowing us to mandate number pooling where appropriate is a healthy signal to consumers, Boyle believes. “Our strong working relationship with the FCC continues to have a positive impact on the policies that impact the public thereby benefiting consumers.”

The Nebraska Public Service Commission will proceed with implementing number pooling consistent with the FCC’s decision, Boyle said.

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