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402 AREA CODE EXTENSION EFFORTS PRODUCES RESULTS

LINCOLN – Nine years ago this month, on May 26, 1999, the Nebraska Public Service Commission was notified by NeuStar, the organization responsible for forecasting area code exhaust dates, that the 402 area code would be depleted in 2000. Conservation measures promoted by the Commission have extended the last exhaust date by an additional six months from the fourth quarter of 2009 to the second quarter of 2010.

Nebraska Public Service Commission Chair Anne Boyle of Omaha said, “The new forecast gives Nebraskans a reason to cheer and appreciate the hard work and expertise of the talented Commission staff for its ability to avoid implementation of a third area code for nearly nine years.” Implementation would have required consumers to either dial 10 digits for local calling or splitting the 402-area code. If a split had occurred, it was presumed that Omaha or Lincoln would keep 402 while the other would have been assigned a new area code. The relief method currently preferred by most states, to ease implementation, is an overlay of the existing 402 area code with a new code resulting in 10-digit dialing.

Western Nebraska is served by the 308-area code which has an estimated exhaust date of the fourth quarter of 2030.

“We have employed a number of programs to avoid a requirement to change our system. The extension permits Nebraskans to continue to avoid the confusion, frustrations and expense of a new area code or 10-digit dialing,” Boyle said.

Commission Vice Chair Frank Landis cited the cooperation of the telephone industry, particularly the state’s two largest landline companies, Qwest and Windstream, in saving numbers. “They returned several blocks of unused 10,000 numbers that were able to be assigned in smaller blocks of 1,000 numbers where they were needed.”

A Commission audit of all companies in early 2000 discovered that only 34 percent of the available 402 area code numbers were in use. Efforts that followed included rate center consolidations, recapturing unused blocks of numbers that had been designated for use by some carriers, and thousand-block pooling rather than assigning numbers in groups of 10,000 as was formerly the case. “Nebraska is a leader in number conservation and monitoring of the states

numbering resources. The Commission continues to work hard to find solutions to conserve numbers on behalf of business and residential consumers,” Boyle said.

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