

# HEIDI HEITKAMP

February 13, 2002

Chairman Michael Powell  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Proceeding # 01-348

Dear Chairman Powell:

As part of my campaign platform when I ran for Governor, I thought North Dakota needed a wireless infrastructure to provide high-speed, broadband Internet to its rural citizens. I continue to believe that is the best way to deliver broadband services to rural states like North Dakota.

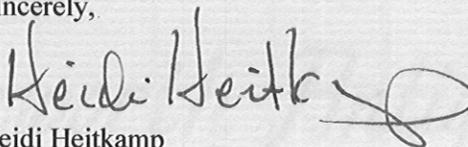
For too long, North Dakota has been on the wrong side of the "digital divide" and we must look for opportunities to close this gap. One of the reasons for this is the massive cost of service delivery to complete the connection over "the last mile" – the distance to the end user from the point of access. It isn't necessarily always cost-effective to trench fiber in the ground or equipment to provide DSL across the entire state. And it isn't fair to expect our local telephone companies to bear this expense. The most cost-effective way to bring broadband access to those communities and farms is a wireless solution and satellite appears to be the best option available.

One method of service delivery is high-speed broadband via satellite. That is why I have been watching the merger of Hughes and EchoStar with interest. This new company, EchoStar, will be poised to provide broadband services to rural Americans because of the removal of duplicative programming. With freed up frequency space on their satellites, they will be capable of delivering additional local programming (100 local markets), more educational programming, HDTV, more entertainment programming, and broadband Internet services.

In fact, I have read comments by Charles Ergen that he will not engage in discriminatory pricing (i.e. rural subscribers pay more than urban subscribers) and plan on pricing their high-speed Internet service competitively with DSL and cable Internet.

As your agency reviews this merger, I hope you will see the positive impact this will have on rural America.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp