**Letter to the editor to the Wall Street Journal in support of the local telephone wholesale system (UNE-P)**

January 13, 2003

To the editor:

The Jan. 7 editorial "A Telecom Breakthrough" points to a proposal that flies in the face of what Congress intended when it declared in 1996 that consumers deserve a choice of local telephone providers. Consumer advocates across the nation believe that local telephone competition can only survive if competitors are able to lease vital parts of the network from the Baby Bells at reasonable rates.

It's no wonder that the Bells are heavily lobbying the FCC and state regulators to eliminate the current wholesale structure and hike the prices they can charge other companies to access the local network. Competitors are finally able to play in the backyards of the regional Bell companies. But the Bells don't want to be friendly neighbors. They would much rather enjoy the monopoly power and guaranteed profits that were taken away by Congress seven years ago.

At whose expense? Consumers. They could see competitive local telephone markets from California and Texas to Ohio and New York disappear, resulting in less choices and higher prices. Meanwhile, recent FCC data shows that incumbent providers still control nearly 90 percent of the market nationwide. Many residential consumers still have no choices because the transition from a regulated to a competitive environment is not yet complete.

Growth and competition must be allowed to continue. We cannot afford to take a giant step backward and ignore the interests of those that deserve and demand the benefits of choice - our nation's consumers.

Sincerely,

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