

RAHALL

Weekly Report

"TELEPHONE RATES"

by Congressman NICK RAHALL

Due to the current restructuring of AT&T and recent Federal Communications Commission decisions, there is concern that such actions may lead to a doubling or even tripling of local telephone rates.

For this reason, I have joined a group of my colleagues in supporting H. Res. 321, which is an important first step to insure that all Americans continue to have access to affordable phone service.

All Americans, especially the elderly, handicapped, and those living in rural areas rely on the telephone as a basic necessity. Fifth years ago, Congress decided that it should be the policy of this country to guarantee universal telephone service at an affordable price to all Americans, and now Congress must reaffirm this commitment.

No one knows exactly what the impact of these rates increases will be, and exactly how many people will be faced with giving up their phones because of the recent, complicated judicial and regulatory actions. That is why, H. Res. 321 is important.

H. Res. 321, expresses the sense of the House that the FCC should initiate a formal investigation to determine the impact on telephone rates of the restructuring of AT&T and FCC decisions. Once the investigation is complete, the resolution further directs the FCC to provide the House of Representatives with estimates of how many Americans would suffer economic hardship or would be forced to disconnect their phone as a result of these changes to phone service.

This effort will not in itself guarantee affordable and high quality phone service to the American people, but it will provide some oversight to the maze of legal and regulatory action surrounding the AT&T divestiture.