

STEPS TAKEN TO ENSURE RURAL INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY FOR EDUCATION

From US Dept. of Agriculture

■ (WASHINGTON) In order to help America's schools and libraries gain access to the information superhighway, the Clinton Administration on Thursday called for free basic telecommunications connections for every K-12 school and library in the country. This special plan called the E-rate, or education rate, provides a framework for ensuring that access to these services for schools and libraries is affordable and that no area is left

out of the information revolution.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Commerce Department and the Department of Education proposed the plan in a filing to the Federal Communications Commission and the Joint Board of Universal Service.

Earlier this week, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman announced \$7.5 million in grants to help rural schools and health care facilities buy end-user equipment to connect hundreds of thousands of rural residents to the information superhighway. The E-rate would ensure that telecommunications transmission charges for schools and libraries in rural areas and throughout the country would be affordable.

The E-rate plan is flexible, market-based, technology neutral, invites competition, protects universal service, and reflects the changing needs of schools and libraries. It is a two-tiered approach that in its first tier proposes a basic package of services be made available to all schools and libraries at no cost to them. Telecommunications ser-

vice providers would be reimbursed from the already existing universal support system. The basic package includes Internet access, sufficient bandwidth to support educational needs, and brings that connection into the school or library. In the second tier, a bidding process would allow schools and libraries to purchase additional services at deeply discounted rates — the ceiling for these bids would be the best commercially available rates in that region or state. Inside wiring, or networking, may be included in this tier. The plan also provides additional discounts for low-income and high-cost areas to have access to these services.

Today's filing was made in response to the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the matter of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (CC Docket No. 96-45). Copies of the filing are available via Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/home/home.htm>. or by calling the Rural Utilities Service Office of Public Affairs at (202) 720-1363.

TWELVE NEW RESEARCH CONSERVATION AREAS ANNOUNCED

From US Dept. of Agriculture

■ (WASHINGTON) Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced on Wednesday the formation of 12 new Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas in 12 states.

The 12 new areas join 277 existing areas and the more than 20,000 volunteers who annually contribute their time and resources to solve the environmental, economic, and social problems facing their communities.

Under this interagency program, USDA provides a coordinator who establishes a full-time office in each RC&D area. The coordinator works closely with local people, volunteers, and RC&D councils to plan, develop, and secure funding for a wide variety of projects.

"The RC&D areas have been extremely successful in achieving a balance between rural economic development and natural resource protection," Glickman said.

RC&D is led by local citizen councils composed of people from the private sector, local organizations, and units of government. Their program activities are initiated and directed by volunteers. Their customers have a major voice in how the program activities are carried out in their respective communities.

The program recognizes the growing awareness on the part of America's national and community leaders that local areas can best control their local economies and destinies, as well as the conservation and wise use of their natural resources.

Last year, Glickman said, RC&D areas helped create 164 new businesses and expanded 298 existing ones — an effort that resulted in 3,200 jobs. At the same time, the areas improved more than 40,000 acres of wildlife habitat, 56,000 acres of lakes, and 2,500 miles of streams.

WEEKLY UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS DOWN

From US Dept. of Labor

■ (WASHINGTON) In the week ending Oct. 5, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 319,000, a decrease of 22,000 from the previous week's revised figure of 341,000. The 4-week moving average was 332,250, a decrease of 2,500 from the previous week's revised average of 334,750.

The advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 2.2 percent for the week ending Sept. 28, unchanged from the prior week's unrevised rate of 2.2 percent.

The advance number for seasonally adjusted insured unemployment during the week ending Sept. 28 was 2,501,000, an increase of 47,000 from the preceding week's revised level of 2,454,000. The 4-week moving average was 2,462,000, a decrease of 21,500 from the preceding week's revised average of 2,483,500.

UNADJUSTED DATA

The advance number of actual initial claims under state programs, unadjusted, totaled 288,951 in the week ending Oct. 5, an increase of 27,686 from the previous week. There were 345,311 initial claims in the comparable week in 1995.

The advance unadjusted insured unemployment rate was 1.8 percent during the week ending Sept. 28, unchanged from the prior week. The advance unadjusted number for persons claiming UI benefits in state

programs totaled 2,003,657, a decrease of 15,679 from the preceding week. A year earlier, the rate was 1.9 percent and the volume was 2,092,237.

Extended benefits were not available in any state during the week ending Sept. 21.

Initial claims for UI benefits by former Federal civilian employees totaled 1,886 in the week ending Sept. 28, a decrease of 179 from the prior week. There were 2,209 initial claims by newly discharged veterans, a decrease of 74 from the preceding week.

There were 25,270 former Federal civilian employees claiming UI benefits for the week ending Sept. 21, a decrease of 1,895 from the previous week. Newly discharged veterans claiming benefits totaled 22,836, a decrease of 227 from the prior week.

The highest insured unemployment rates in the week ending Sept. 21 were in Puerto Rico (7.0 percent), Alaska (3.4), Rhode Island (3.1), California (3.0), Hawaii (2.6), New Jersey (2.6), Washington (2.6), Oregon (2.4), Pennsylvania (2.4), and Arkansas (2.3).

The largest increases in initial claims for the week ending Sept. 28 were in Tennessee (+1,381), Michigan (+883), Oklahoma (+747), Illinois and Iowa (+697), while the largest decreases were in North Carolina (-4,591), Puerto Rico (-3,574), Georgia (-1,550), Florida (-1,205), and South Carolina (-1,098).