



Regulators OK sale of Verizon's landlines

By MIKE RIOPELL - H&R Springfield Bureau Writer | Posted: Thursday, April 22, 2010 4:01 am

SPRINGFIELD - State regulators Wednesday agreed to allow a Connecticut-based company to buy Verizon's landline phone operation in Illinois, a move that could eventually affect more than 600,000 customers in the state.

As a condition of the sale, Frontier Communications Corp. would have to eventually satisfy strict service quality and broadband Internet requirements.

Though Frontier won the support of the Illinois Commerce Commission Wednesday, the company still needs some approvals nationally before it can buy Verizon's lines. If they do, the move will affect customers in Bloomington, Carbondale, and dozens of small towns across the state.

"We're pleased the commission has approved this transaction, which will provide many benefits to Illinois residents, including increased investment and broadband availability in the state," said Carl Erhart, president of Verizon's Central region.

The commission approved the deal on a 5-0 vote.

Commissioner Erin O'Connell-Diaz said her work on the issue was influenced because she personally has a hard time getting broadband Internet at home. She has dial-up service.

"I know what it's like to be a second-class citizen relative to 21st (century) technology," O'Connell-Diaz said.

Verizon wants to sell off their landline service in 14 states in order to concentrate more on their wireless operation. They still need an OK from West Virginia and the Federal Communications Commission.

Consumer advocates had protested the deal previously but changed their position based on the conditions placed on Frontier's purchase. Citizens Utility Board Executive Director David Kolata said the company's performance will have to be monitored going forward.

"We think it's something that will be good for consumers long-term," Kolata said.

Frontier senior vice president Steve Crosby said the difference customers will see between his company and Verizon is that more decisions about service and promotions will be made locally.

"We're pretty darn hands-on," Crosby said.

In approving the sale, the Commerce Commission disagreed with a judge's recommendation to reject it.

Commission Chair Manuel Flores said the commission will ask for regular updates about service quality from Frontier if the deal eventually goes through.

"This merger will test the managerial skills of Frontier," Flores said.

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