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## SBC feels heat over non-union lease deal

By Mike Ivey  
October 31, 2003

With SBC Wisconsin rolling out ads for its new long distance service, its competitors are attacking the phone giant for using leased networks from a non-union provider in Oklahoma.

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SBC, formerly Ameritech, just received regulatory approval to offer long distance service in Wisconsin and began its marketing campaign statewide last Friday.

During the approval process, SBC had touted its commitment to its union employees and its investment in the poles and wires that carry telephone signals. It also had received an endorsement from the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, which has long criticized other long distance carriers who were non-union.

But a group that includes AT&T, TDS Metrocom, Time Warner Telecom and McLeod USA today accused the state's largest phone company of an "astounding level of hypocrisy" in its long distance strategy.

Curt Pawlisch, an attorney for Wisconsin CALLS, said SBC's filing with state commissions in the Midwest shows it intends to resell service from WiTel Communications of Tulsa, Okla., to provide long distance in its five-state Midwest region.

"SBC has no qualms about criticizing other local phone companies for leasing its lines and not investing in Wisconsin telephone infrastructure," said Pawlisch. "Now we know how they offer long distance service in Wisconsin - by reselling service from WiTel."

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But an SBC spokesman dismissed those comments.

Jeff Bentoff said SBC has by far the largest union presence of any telephone company in the state. He noted that Time Warner, one member of Wisconsin CALLS, is among the most vocal anti-union companies in the industry.

"The latest CALLS attack shows yet again that these companies would rather whine and complain than actually compete for customers," said Bentoff.

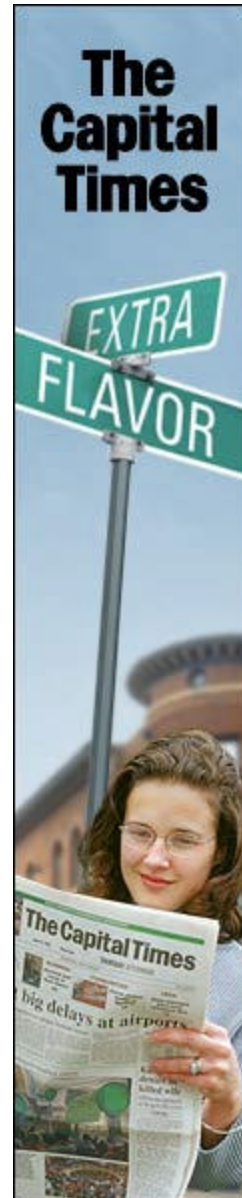
SBC employs about 6,500 in Wisconsin, including nearly 4,500 members of the Communications Workers of America.

Pawlisch said those union members were instrumental in helping SBC lobby state regulators for long distance approval.

"Unfortunately for CWA members, their leadership trusted the monopolists at SBC to support their union membership once they secured long distance approval," he said.

But Bentoff countered that SBC Wisconsin has been investing in its local network for years, largely with a union work force.

"We have been allowed to sell long distance only since last Friday. That's one reason we haven't built a nationwide long distance network entirely of our own," he said. "These other companies have been offering long distance for years. Where are their union employees and union-operated networks?"



Pawlich also disputed the claims that Wisconsin CALLS members were not contributing to investment in telephone infrastructure. He referenced a study by the Phoenix Center which showed that the federal 1996 Telecommunications Act - the act that mandated local phone competition - has generated an additional \$267 billion in telecommunications investment from 1996-2001.

Other CALLS members include AARP Wisconsin, the Citizens' Utility Board, Charter Fiber Link, Wisconsin Merchants Federation, Powercom, Wisconsin Retired Educators Assoc., Sage Telecom and Norlight Telecom.

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