short-term ratings assigned to the GSE by a Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organization (NRSRO). Generally speaking, GSEs currently receive the highest investment grade rating assigned by an NRSRO. For all such counterparties, a Bank's maximum allowable unsecured credit exposure under § 932.9 cannot exceed 15 percent of the Bank's total capital or of the counterparty's regulatory capital, whichever amount is lower.

Some Banks have indicated that, given the magnitude of the reduction in the allowable credit exposure to a GSE under § 932.9, they will experience difficulty in developing new investment strategies to conform to these new limits. Since publication of the final unsecured credit rule, some Banks have indicated that GSE debt offers an attractive risk-return profile not available from other investments, especially in the immediate future. Some Banks also have suggested that GSEs are a better credit risk than other counterparties, even those counterparties with the highest investment grade ratings, and point to the premium over corporate debt at which GSE debt trades in the markets as an indication of the GSEs' special status. These Banks further claim that the new restrictions on their credit exposures to GSEs may result in greater investment in instruments with a lesser credit quality.

In the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section of the final capital rule, the Finance Board noted that it ''may solicit additional comments regarding the appropriateness of the [unsecured credit] limits in future rulemaking and may consider revising them at that time.'' 66 FR 8302. The Finance Board also recognizes that for some Banks, the magnitude of the reduction in the allowable unsecured credit limit applicable to GSEs could be disruptive and that, historically, GSEs have been viewed more favorably by debt markets than even the highest-rated corporate debt issuers. Thus, the Finance Board is proposing to amend 12 CFR 932.9 to raise the limit on a Bank's unsecured extensions of credit to a GSE and is requesting comment and supporting analysis concerning the appropriate level for this new limit.

It also has been suggested that the Finance Board amend 12 CFR 932.9 to exclude from the unsecured credit limits the sale of Federal funds with a maturity of one day or less, or Federal funds sold under a continuing contract, as do commercial bank regulators. *See* 12 CFR Part 32. The Finance Board requests comment on whether it should adopt such an exclusion, although it is not proposing to do so at this time. If commenters support such an exclusion, they should provide data indicating how the lack of such an overnight Federal funds exclusion in 12 CFR 932.9 would negatively affect the Banks and should address why such an exclusion would not raise safety and soundness concerns.

III. Regulatory Flexibility Act

The proposed rule applies only to the Banks, which do not come within the meaning of small entities as defined in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA). *See* 5 U.S.C. 601(6). Therefore, in accordance with section 605(b) of the RFA, 5 U.S.C. 605(b), the Finance Board hereby certifies that this proposed rule, if promulgated as a final rule, will not have a significant economic effect on a substantial number of small entities.

IV. Paperwork Reduction Act

The proposed rule does not contain any collections of information pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. *See* 33 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.* Therefore, the Finance Board has not submitted any information to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

Dated: February 28, 2001.

By the Board of Directors of the Federal Housing Finance Board.

Allan I. Mendelowitz,

Chairman.

[FR Doc. 01–5474 Filed 3–6–01; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6725–01–P

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

18 CFR Part 284

[Docket No. PL00–1–000]

Dialog Concerning Natural Gas Transportation Policies Needed To Facilitate Development of Competitive Natural Gas Markets

March 2, 2001.

AGENCY: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Department of Energy.

ACTION: Notice organizing staff conference.

SUMMARY: In Order 637, issued on February 9, 2000, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission) revised its regulatory policies, amended its regulations, and established new procedures to enhance the competitiveness and efficiency of markets for the transportation of natural gas in interstate commerce. This notice provides the organizational framework for the second of three public staff conferences in a dialog between the industry and Commission staff. This conference focuses on affiliate issues.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The conference will take place on March 15, 2001, starting at 1 p.m. Persons wishing to submit further comments following the conclusion of the conference must submit them by April 30, 2001.

ADDRESSES: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert A. Flanders, Office of Markets, Tariffs and Rates, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426, (202) 208–2084, e-mail: Robert.Flanders@ferc.fed.us

Notice Organizing Staff Conference on Competitive Natural Gas Markets

This notice provides the organizational format for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission staff conference to be held on March 15, 2001 to discuss how the changes in the natural gas market affect the way in which the Commission should regulate transportation transactions between pipelines and their affiliates, as well as between pipeline capacity holders and their affiliates, capacity managers and agents. The purpose of this conference is to continue the dialog begun with the September 19, 2000 staff conference to enable the industry to discuss with staff, as well as with each other, issues relating to the development of Commission policy and regulatory responses to rate and service revisions to meet the needs of the changing natural gas market. The conference will begin at 1:00 p.m. at the Commission's offices, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC in the Commission's Meeting Room.

The November 22, 2000 notice [1] of the conference requested those who were interested in making presentations or participating to indicate their interest by January 5, 2001. Sixteen requests to participate in the roundtable debate were made and comments from twenty-six interested persons were received.

The conference will be structured as a roundtable debate with staff as moderator. Panel participants are identified below. In order to facilitate a robust discussion of the affiliate issues identified in the November 22, 2000 notice, a roundtable debate format was selected. Accordingly, participants will not have the opportunity to make oral

[1] 65 FR 75627 (Dec. 4, 2000).

presentations. Interested persons have already had the opportunity to submit written comments reflecting their positions, and, as discussed below, are invited to submit additional comments. Participants should feel free to discuss or debate all topics during the course of the roundtable debate.

The composition of the roundtable panel is as follows:

Dena Wiggins, Process Gas Consumers Group, et al.
Representative to be designated, Ad Hoc Marketers Group
Thomas Riley, Independent Oil & Gas Assoc. of West Virginia
Alice Curtis, American Gas Association
Craig Goodman, National Energy Marketers Assoc.
Joan Dreskin, Interstate Natural Gas Assoc. of America
Jeff Holligan, Amoco Production Company and BP Energy Company
Denise Goulet, National Assoc. of State Utility Consumer Advocates
John Smith, The Williams Companies
Mark Haskell, Natural Gas Supply Assoc.
Leslie Lawner, Enron North America Corporation
Paul Koonce, Dominion Resources, Inc.
Michael Linn, Independent Petroleum Assoc. of America
Ed Ross, Dynegy, Inc.
Phillip Teumim, New York Public Service Commission
Kirby Bosley, Reliant Energy Services, Inc.
Mike Reidy, California Dairy Coalition of Concerned Energy Consumers

The Capitol Connection patrons in the Washington, DC area will receive notices regarding the broadcast of the conference. The conference will be available, for a fee, live over the Internet, via C-Band Satellite, and via telephone conferencing. Persons interested in receiving the broadcast, or who need further information, should contact David Reininger or Julia Morelli at the Capitol Connection (703–993–3100) as soon as possible or visit the Capitol Connection web site at http://www.capitolconnection.org and click on ''FERC.''

The Commission invites interested persons and participants to submit additional comments on the affiliate issues debated at the conference including any related matters or alternative proposals that commenters may wish to discuss and must be received by the Commission before 5 p.m. on April 30, 2001.

After-conference comments may be filed either in paper format or electronically. Those filing electronically do not need to make a paper filing. For paper filings, the original and 14 copies of such comments should be submitted to the Office of the Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426 and should refer to Docket No. PL00–1–000.

Comments filed via the Internet must be prepared in WordPerfect, MS Word, Portable Document Format, or ASCII format. To file the document, access the Commission's website (*www.ferc.fed.us*) and click on ''Make An E-Filing,'' and then follow the instructions for each screen. First-time users will have to establish a user name and password. The Commission will send an automatic acknowledgment to the sender's E-Mail address upon receipt of comments.

User assistance for electronic filing is available at 202–208–0258 or by E-Mail to *efiling@ferc.fed.us.* Comments should not be submitted to the E-Mail address. All comments will be placed in the Commission's public files and will be available for inspection in the Commission's Public Reference Room at 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426 during regular business hours. Additionally, all comments may be viewed, printed, or downloaded remotely via the Internet through FERC's Homepage using the RIMS link. User assistance for RIMS is available at 202–208–2222, or by E-Mail to *rimsmaster@ferc.fed.us.*

Questions about the conference should be directed to: Robert Flanders, Office of Markets Tariffs and Rates, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426, 202–208–2084, Robert.flanders@ferc.fed.us

Linwood A. Watson,
Acting Secretary.

[FR Doc. 01–5518 Filed 3–6–01; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 6717–01–M

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

47 CFR Part 43

[CC Docket No. 98–137; FCC 01–68]

1998 Biennial Regulatory Review—Review of Depreciation Requirements for Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers

AGENCY: Federal Communications Commission.

ACTION: Proposed rule; denial.

SUMMARY: In this document the Commission denied US West, Inc. (now Qwest) petition for reconsideration of our December 30, 1999 Depreciation Order. The US West, Inc. petition sought reconsideration of: our denial of United States Telephone Association petition for forbearance; the methodology for certain equipment life ranges, and the accounting treatment in waiver situation. The Commission concluded that US West, Inc had not provided any new information or arguments that required us to alter our prior rulings.

ADDRESSES: Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445–12th Street, SW, TW–A325, Washington, DC 20554.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: JoAnn Lucanik, Accounting Safeguards Division, Common Carrier Bureau, at (202) 418–0873.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This is a summary of the Commission's Order on Reconsideration adopted February 21, 2001, and released February 26, 2001. The full text of this Commission decision is available for inspection and copying during normal business hours in the FCC Reference Center (Room CY–A257), 445 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20554. The complete text may also be purchased from the Commission's copy contractor, International Transcription Service, Inc., 1231 20th Street, Washington, DC 20036, telephone (202) 857–3800.

Summary of Order on Reconsideration

In this order, we deny a petition for reconsideration filed on May 10, 2000, by US West, Inc. (now Qwest) of our December 30, 1999 Order (*Depreciation Order*) (which was not published in the **Federal Register**). In the *Depreciation Order,* which was part of our 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review proceeding, we undertook an extensive review of our depreciation requirements for price cap incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs). Although we denied a petition filed by the United States Telecom Association (USTA) to forbear from imposing depreciation requirements on price cap ILECs, we significantly streamlined our depreciation requirements, and set out specific conditions under which ILECs could seek waiver of these requirements.

In a subsequent order, released on November 7, 2000, 66 FR 9681 (February 9, 2001), we reviewed an alternative proposal for relieving carriers of our depreciation requirements. We concluded that the alternative proposal to permit an above-the-line accounting treatment of the financial-to-regulatory book differential in lieu of a below-the-line accounting treatment lacked the inherent protections provided for in the waiver process adopted in the *Depreciation*