

Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
FCC-NARUC Joint Conference on Advanced Services
Broadband Summit: Connecting America
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Introduction

Good Morning. This is an historic meeting of the Joint Conference on Advanced Services, and I appreciate having the opportunity to co-locate our meeting with the Wireless Communications Association's annual Symposium and thank Mr. Fred Campbell, their CEO. Certainly, I would like to commend Chairman Martin for his leadership, and my State Colleagues: Commissioners Landis, Johnson, Baum, Tanner, and Chong. I must take a moment to express my deep gratitude to Commissioner Chong first for her skilled coordination and sheer persistence in creating this opportunity. I believe that our work can have a positive and lasting impact on the future of broadband deployment across this nation. Finally, thank you to our esteemed panelists, from all across the country, who will share their experiences with public-private partnerships that have linked many towns and communities through business case scenarios and consensus building. Broadband is indeed the economic development tool to insure sustainable growth through green technologies, decrease unemployment through new job creation, and provide educational tools for the jobs of tomorrow.

It has been my honor to serve first as a state member and now as the Federal Chair of the 706 Joint Conference, and I look forward to working with all of you to fulfill our mission –ensuring that advanced services are deployed as rapidly as possible to all Americans, and to serve as a forum for an ongoing dialogue among the Commission, state regulators, and local and regional entities regarding the deployment of advanced telecommunications capabilities. As the former Chairman of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority, I understand that the states are important partners in the deployment of advanced services. Working together, our combined expertise can ensure that we will fulfill our mission of deploying broadband access to all corners of our nation.

The importance of our mission

Why is our mission – as the 706 Board and here today – so important? The economic effects from broadband connectivity are exponential in impact; raising productivity of our workforce at the office, on the road, and even when telecommuting from home. Just the salient economic effects are enough to get our attention. Wireless providers have already invested \$15 million dollars in wireless broadband, and a recent study by Connected Nation estimated that increased availability of broadband across the U.S. would have a positive economic impact of \$134 billion. However, we have a grander focus than merely positive revenue. Broadband is vital to this nation’s information revolution, just as steel was vital to our industrial revolution in creating

important infrastructure for our cities and towns, like interstate highways and industrial parks – which brought jobs, people, and investment. Broadband connections are the backbone of America’s 21st Century economy and will play a crucial role in assuring that our citizens compete on a global scale—no matter where they live.

With broadband, the click of a mouse allows an adult to attend class at a university across the nation while still holding a job across town. Broadband is increasing civic participation allowing a multiplicity of voices on national campaigns as well as participation in local issues. An entirely new advertising industry has developed online, with almost nothing spent on online ads in the 2004 presidential race, to over \$100 million spent for the 2008 presidential campaign.

Broadband has a dramatic impact and has brought remarkable growth here in America—now at 100 million lines—and we will continue to see additional benefits from broadband, such as the potential to create a physically healthier nation.

A broadband connection makes the physical distance between a provider of medical care and the patient immaterial – allowing rural families and communities better access to healthcare through teledentistry, telepsychiatry, and even telesurgery. I have seen firsthand how broadband enables this kind of empowerment for those who are the most physically isolated, from Appalachia to Alaska. I commend Chairman Martin for his leadership and effort in launching the *Rural Healthcare Pilot Program* and look forward to hearing from one of the funded projects today. I also implore you

to think of broadband not only as a wireline issue, but to think across the spectrum, literally and figuratively, about how we can help ensure broadband connectivity to Americans. During the “white spaces” discussions over the past year, I pressed for utilizing portions of the spectrum for broadband backhaul to provide both more capacity as well as more competition as additional broadband is deployed. It is important that we make sure that the next technologies, what ever they may be, can access and be accessed by rural Americans.

The states and their progress

One of the important goals of this meeting is to share the best practices states and even localities are undertaking. My home state, Tennessee, was the first to have every single school connected to the internet, and we now have fiber to 70% of our schools – 80 out of 96 counties. In addition, 90% of schools are using VoIP technology, enabling administrative savings while ensuring that our rural students have the same opportunity as urban students. In addition, Tennessee saw a 37% increase in broadband connections in rural areas during the second half of 2007, an increase of 133,000 broadband connections due to the good work of partnerships formed between government and organizations, such as Connected Tennessee, that you will hear more about from Mr. Michael Ramage.

Federal Government

It is imperative that the Federal Government continue to promote the nationwide deployment of broadband, and recognize, encourage, and support state efforts to improve the quality and availability of broadband services to their citizens. One important step the Federal government can take is to implement an accurate nationwide inventory of broadband deployment. Senator Inouye spearheaded this bill in the Senate, and President Bush recently signed the Broadband Mapping Bill into law on October 10, 2008.

This bill empowers the FCC to revise its metrics; creating tiers of broadband service instead of the single broad definition that we have used in the past, supporting both the mapping and tracking of broadband *deployment* and *adoption* in every state. This is an exciting step towards universal broadband deployment and is a great example of the importance of continued cooperation between Congress, Federal government, and the States to achieve our collective goals.

Conclusion

Ensuring broadband access to all Americans—but especially those in low income or rural America – is not only important to our national economy but crucial to our global competitiveness as well. I am proud of the deregulatory road the FCC has forged; serving as a “humble regulator” so that we incent investment and innovation. I look forward to our esteemed panelists and their enlightening presentations regarding initiatives occurring all across this great country and thank all of you for your

participation. More than ever, a broadband connection to the World Wide Web links all of us to unlimited opportunities locally and globally.