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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
FEBRUARY 28, 1992

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**HIGH TECH HOPE FOR RURAL AMERICA  
THE COMMUNICATIONS COMPETITIVENESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE MODERNIZATION ACT  
SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE TESTIMONY**

AS AN ORIGINAL COSPONSOR OF S. 1200, THE "COMMUNICATIONS COMPETITIVENESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE MODERNIZATION ACT", I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ADD MY VIEWS TO THE RECORD.

I'D LIKE TO COMMEND MY GOOD FRIEND FROM MONTANA, SENATOR BURNS, FOR HIS LEADERSHIP ON THIS AND A HOST OF OTHER TELECOMMUNICATIONS ISSUES. "DIEHARD DETERMINATION" IS PROBABLY NOT TOO STRONG A PHRASE TO DESCRIBE HIS EFFORTS TO BRING THIS INITIATIVE BEFORE THE COMMITTEE AND THE SENATE.

I AM TEMPTED TO CALL THIS BILL "VISIONARY" - BUT THAT'S NOT QUITE RIGHT, BECAUSE THE FACTS ARE PLAIN TO SEE, FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO LOOK. I'D CALL IT "FUTURISTIC", EXCEPT IN THIS CASE THE FUTURE IS NOW.

LET'S FACE IT: THESE TECHNOLOGIES ARE GOING TO BE DEVELOPED, AND FIBER OPTIC PATHWAYS ARE GOING TO BE LAID OUT. IT'S HAPPENING NOW. THE QUESTION IS, WILL THIS BE DONE IN A WAY THAT BENEFITS THE ALREADY ADVANTAGED - THE "INFORMATION RICH" - MAJOR CORPORATIONS THAT CAN AFFORD TO PAY FOR THE LATEST EDGE IN MAKING MONEY --- OR WILL WE PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO BRING THIS TECHNOLOGY TO ALL AMERICANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE TO WHOM IT CAN MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE: RURAL AMERICANS, INNER CITY AMERICANS, AND AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES?

WE CANNOT RISK THE CREATION OF INFORMATION-AGE "HAVES" AND "HAVE-NOTS".

THIS BILL IS ABOUT ENSURING THAT OPPORTUNITY. I'M ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THE BENEFITS THAT A COMPREHENSIVE, PRIVATELY CREATED BROADBAND NETWORK WILL BRING TO OUR CITIZENS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES, AND IN THE RESOURCES AND HOPE IT CAN PROVIDE TO MANY AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES.

THIS TECHNOLOGY CAN AND DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE. MY OWN STATE OF KANSAS IS A LEADER IN ATTEMPTING TO APPLY TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING - SO THAT WE CLOSE GAPS IN THE CURRICULUM, INSTEAD OF SCHOOLS.

IN KANSAS RIGHT NOW, MORE THAN SIXTY RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE LINKED TOGETHER BY EIGHT INTERACTIVE VIDEO CLUSTERS. THESE PROGRAMS HELP REVITALIZE RURAL AMERICA BY BRINGING TO OUR STUDENTS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES NECESSARY TO KEEP THEM COMPETITIVE ON A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL. I WON'T DETAIL FOR YOU THE LIST OF COURSES, CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES - LIKE THE CAPACITY OF OPTICAL FIBER, IT'S ALMOST LIMITLESS.

AND INTERACTIVE VIDEO IN RURAL COMMUNITIES CAN SAVE LIVES. KANSAS IS A PIONEER IN REMOTE DIAGNOSIS TECHNOLOGY, USING TWO-WAY HIGH RESOLUTION VIDEO; RURAL EXAMINATION SITES ARE BEING LINKED UP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS MEDICAL CENTER. PATIENTS WILL HAVE THE INSTANT EXPERTISE OF A SPECIALIST WITHOUT SPENDING LONG HOURS DRIVING -- ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HOW INFORMATION PATHWAYS ARE REPLACING OUR HIGHWAYS.

BROADBAND NETWORKS BRING WITH THEM THE WIDER AVAILABILITY OF SPECIAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED, SUCH AS TDD FOR THE HEARING-IMPAIRED. IN ADDITION, FOR THOSE LIMITED IN THEIR ABILITY TO GET OUT TO A JOB OR WORKSITE, FIBER EXPANDS THE RANGE OF "TELECOMMUTING" - BRINGING THE WORKSITE TO THEM.

THIS BILL REQUIRES THAT THESE VITAL SERVICES - AND THESE UNDER-SERVED AREAS - BE A PRIORITY. MEETING THESE NEEDS WOULD BE A PRECONDITION FOR A PROVIDER'S ENTRY INTO NUMEROUS PROFITABLE LINES OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUSINESS.

FINALLY, LET'S POINT OUT WHAT THIS BILL IS NOT. IT'S NOT A "TELCO" BILL, OR A CABLE BILL, OR A SATELLITE BILL. THIS BILL MEANS TO PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO WHATEVER SERVICE PROVIDER IS WILLING TO INVEST TO MAKE THESE BENEFITS AVAILABLE. IF I WOULD SUGGEST ANYTHING TO MY COLLEAGUES ON THIS COMMITTEE, IT'S THAT THE LEGISLATION BE CLARIFIED AND STRENGTHENED ON THAT POINT.

TOO OFTEN THESE INITIATIVES ARE TREATED AS STAKES IN SOME ZERO-SUM GAME BETWEEN LOBBIES FOR VARIOUS COMPETING INDUSTRY SEGMENTS. THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M INTERESTED IN; THAT'S NOT, I THINK, WHAT THIS COMMITTEE IS INTERESTED IN; AND THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS BILL IS ALL ABOUT.

THIS BILL IS AN EFFORT TO HELP INSURE THAT AMERICA IS NOT LEFT BEHIND - THAT IT'S READY FOR A GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE FUTURE - AND THAT THAT FUTURE BELONGS TO ALL AMERICANS.

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