

Statement to Congressman Delgado by David Berman, Co-Chair of Connect Columbia

Thank you Congressman Delgado for this opportunity. I am the Co-Chair of Connect Columbia, a citizen's action committee made up of elected officials and interested residents that have banded together to bring true broadband to the people of Columbia County. My Co-Chair, Patti Matheney is also here.

Let me define True Broadband in 2019 terms—a minimum of a symmetrical 100 Mbits/sec growing to a symmetrical 1 gigabit within five years. The Commissions definition is considerably out of date and needs to be upgraded immediately. Many of our international competitors are already at the gigabit level.

With that out of the way, let me take just a moment to describe the current conditions in Columbia County. We were fortunate to receive over \$30 million from Governor Cuomo's broadband initiative and CAF funding. This has taken us to coverage for most of our residents but still leaving huge gaps in our geography. Why? Because the economics require density of potential subscribers which effectively penalizes rural areas. The State and CAF money were used to fiber those areas where density made the economics work and then a very confusing satellite overlay was applied to theoretically give everyone access which it decidedly did not. As I'm sure the Commissioner is aware the use of high latency, moderate to low throughput satellite technology is merely a band-aid that cannot meet current demand much less the exponentially growing demand.

So how do we fill in the holes to give everyone access to true high-speed broadband that has scalable technology to meet growing speed and capacity requirements?

Even though current Federal programs are constructed to fix the basic problem of access, their requirements effectively preclude those they are designed to help. An example is a recent program that required an area to have 90 percent of the population to lack coverage—sounds logical doesn't it? So, consider a farming area with a central village. The village population overwhelmingly exceeds the farming one and therefore 90% can't be achieved. The measurement is correct economically from a cost per person served basis but fails miserably to provide access to rural areas where modern agriculture requires cutting edge technology to effectively manage the process of growing our food supply not to mention the children of farmers who need access to all the educational tools and resources now available.

The only solution to this issue is to base local, state and federal programs on the goal of reaching every address in the United States. That means scrapping the use of census blocks to define coverage, availability, financing, etc. Very simply census blocks are both confusing and lead to some bizarre results. A perfect example is the street behind my house—German Church Road. Like many streets, it bisects two census blocks, one which was granted money for broadband and the other wasn't, so a provider doesn't get reimbursed for providing service to the other side of the street.

Clearly every address that gets electricity should get broadband. Just like electricity which runs many devices essential to our lives, large capacity communication capability is far more than voice, internet, email and tweets. We are still in the early stages of what big pipe connectivity can do beyond those mentioned with efficiencies in health care at the top of the list.

It is no longer practical to separate internet access from voice and television since they all come over the same wire, fiber or frequency. Two out of three can't be ubiquitous while one remains unavailable. It is more important than ever in this economy to ensure every business and every person is connected to the content they want just as they can speak to anyone via traditional POTS. The Commission as a regulatory body needs to expand its vision to encourage expansion of existing technologies and leave the door wide open for new ones that will enable even more ways to both connect and ensure security.

Finally, Congress must act to first rationalize the myriad number of competing programs that ostensibly are in place to facilitate the expansion of broadband and then expedite the actual work being done, completed and importantly measured so that suppliers meet the needs of consumers.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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