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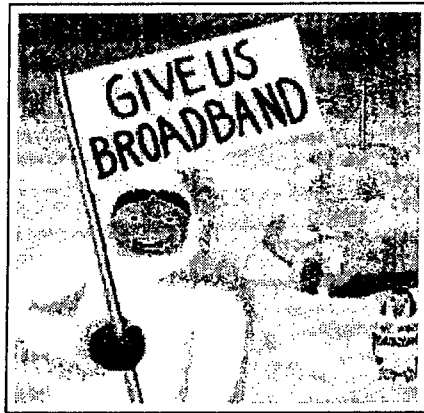
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Rural Broadband in Alaska

Issues, trends and connectivity on the last frontier. http://www.geocities.com/qayaq_alaska/
<http://alaskaruraldevelopment.blogspot.com/> <http://martinleonard.blogspot.com/>

10.28.2004

A Message to the RCA Commissioners...



Delivering on 'The Promise of Broadband'

(excerpted from a presentation developed in support of United Utilities, Inc, Delta Net Proposal, for testimony before the Regulatory Commission of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, October 2004)

Regarding the 'Rural Alaska Broadband Internet Program'
<http://www.state.ak.us/rca/broadband.html>

BACKGROUND

For me the obvious question that arises when I consider the implications of a rural broadband initiative is WHAT? What are we trying to accomplish with this project? What is broadband? And what are the implications for the end goal- broadband in village Alaska?

From the RFP, the project purpose reads: *The purpose of the Rural Alaska Broadband Internet Access Grant Program (Program) is to provide economic, employment and educational opportunities to some of the most isolated and economically depressed areas of rural Alaska.*

[Let's be clear!, this is a very well recognized, lofty and worthy

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purpose...we've been hearing about economic development, employment and educational opportunity for rural Alaska(ns) for years (read: decades)...it's big nut to crack, who is actually 'doing it - who is 'capacity building' at the village level?! In all honesty, there are very few developing economies in the Y-K Delta, our Bethel and Wade Hampton census areas have the worst unemployment record in the Nation, and our K12 students are consistently under-prepared. In solving rural Alaska's isolation and economic depression problems, Broadband has a huge uphill battle...but there is *Promise!*]

IMOH, as written, this program:

Has (or should have) much less to do with 'delivering broadband internet service' as it has to do with 'Delivering the Promise of Broadband Access'.

It has as much to do with building out telecommunications infrastructure as it has to do with supporting infostructure development at the village level.

It is incumbent upon the Regulatory Commission and the USDA, as program facilitators and managers, to understand the differences if you plan on truly fulfilling the purpose of the program initiative as written.

I have an MBA in telecommunications management, have studied and been involved with data communications and the delivery of technology in rural Alaska for 20+ years...Can someone tell me what Broadband is? Is it 512KBps up / 256KBps data down to my desktop, is it a connection that is full-time and always on, is it bandwidth availability / CIR and Burst potential / QOS ? What is it?

To me, the concept of Broadband is embedded in the differences between **Access and Service**. Broadband 'service' is exemplified by an ISP's offering...speed, amount of data transfer, a cost per month...irrespective of time, place or people! Access entitles the end user to all of the features and amenities common to knowledgeable and regular users of data communications technologies. While cost and speed efficient services are a logical trend, more critical to the delivery of Access is: local / culturally relevant technical support, local / culturally relevant educational opportunities, real bandwidth, and most importantly, the potential for increased levels of service when/where needed.

Service is 'Technology' driven...Access is 'Use / User Concept' driven.

Providing Access is core to the purpose of the RCA USDA program. You can not be satisfied with just providing service if you are intent on

'Delivering the Promise of Broadband'!

Infostructure is an under-used term. Way under-used! It is synonymous with the 'people part' of infrastructure development. It is the way that the technology being delivered is framed-up, promoted and presented to the end user. It is what leads the end user to the adoption and ubiquitous use of the technologies and infrastructure being presented. *Supporting infostructure development along with infrastructure deployment is central to what your program is striving to accomplish.*

I must commend the RCA and the authors of the Broadband RFP for including aspects of infostructure development in your program...it will bear fruit.

DELTA NET PROPOSAL

Specific to the Delta Net Proposal.

The RCA USDA initiative, with the purpose as written, clearly is about an 'end product', about people and the results of bringing access to a community of users.

"...providing economic, employment and educational opportunities to some of the most isolated and economically depressed areas of rural Alaska."

It makes very good sense then that standing before you, submitting both written and oral testimony, are organizations representing the **essential group of end users** who stand to benefit the most from your program... *Tribes and tribal entities, Healthcare service providers and their patients, K-12 educators and students and Higher education professors and students and Y-K Delta community members.* Please listen to them as these partnerships and the cooperation they exude are *the keys* to the success of your program. I also encourage you, all of the commission, to take them up on their offer to visit their home and learn and see for yourself the implications for your decisions.

Lets not dwell on the technology...it is incumbent upon the commission staff of technologists and engineers to provide you, the commissioners, with the background information regarding the pros and cons of satellite-based facilities versus the terrestrial facilities being presented in the Delta Net proposal. I hope they have done so. You have heard testimony from some of rural Alaska's most experienced telecommunications engineers in support of the project. ***The construction of terrestrial-based telecommunications facilities is forward thinking and represents the future of data communications in our underserved villages.*** [*When you complete that fibre link to the Bering Sea and up the Kuskokwim / Yukon Rivers...we'll be ready for you ;-)*]

Committing more dollars to infrastructure development without consideration of additional support for infostructure development at the village level is short-sighted. *Consider additional support for these crucial components along with expanding facilities...it will pay huge dividends in the end!*

SUMMARY

Bill Thompson of the BBC put it well "It is time to stop treating the internet as if it was totally separate from the real world and accept that its importance comes from ways it is embedded in everyday life, because real people do not see the net as special."

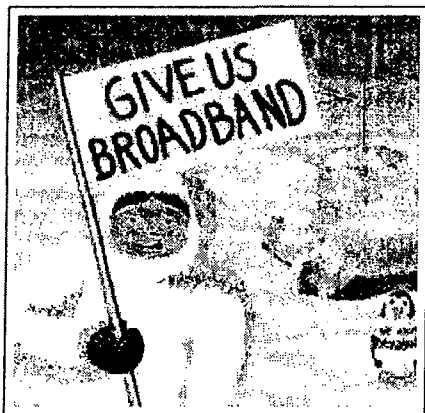
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/2526897.stm>

It is your job to ensure that the internet and the potentials available as a result of improved access to data communication technologies are realized...Embedded in the Y-K Delta!

Only then will your project purpose be recognized. Only then will the people of the Y-K Delta benefit fully from the delivery of Broadband Internet in Rural Alaska.

Quyana,

ML



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