

Rural Phone Companies' Perspectives on Federal Stimulus Projects Affected by Broadband Deployment Law, PTA President Tells Senate Committee

The 2004 law, Act 183, that established threshold dates for universal broadband deployment in exchange for the easing of some regulations on telcos is working, and has made Pennsylvania the most progressive broadband deployment state in the nation, according to Steven J. Samara, President of the Pennsylvania Telephone Association (PTA).

"The vast majority of my member companies had broadband deployed throughout their service territories by the end of 2008," Samara recently told members of the Senate Communications & Technology Committee. "The few companies who are not completely done are well ahead of their statutory commitments under the act."

"The bottom line is this: there already exists a robust broadband network in Pennsylvania. Consequently, my member companies are sensitive to potential overbuilding."

At the same time, Samara said that the PTA is not opposed to federal stimulus projects.

Several PTA members have applied for and been granted stimulus revenue.

Fiber Technologies Networks (Fibertech), the contractor for the KINBER project*, is an Associate Member of the PTA. Several PTA members have reached out to Fibertech, and the PTA has opened a dialogue with the company to discuss the project.

"The goal is to generate partnership opportunities and realize a working relationship that will deploy broadband in an efficient manner," Samara said. "Obviously there is a vision, a current network infrastructure and several creative, experienced parties involved."

Finally, Samara congratulated the Republican and Democrat Chairs of the Committee, Mike Folmer, R-Lebanon and John Wozniak, D-Cambria, on their sponsorship of SR 133. SR 133 urges the President of the United States and the Governor to institute a broadband mobilization strategy to manage funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

"There is substantial revenue being pumped into states all across the nation for broadband deployment, and guiding principles for the use of that money in Pennsylvania is just good public policy," Samara said.

* The Keystone Initiative for Network-Based Education and Research (KINBER) is embarking on a statewide initiative to increase delivery of broadband throughout Pennsylvania. Known as the Pennsylvania Research and Education Network (PennREN), the project has attracted about \$130 million in combined federal and private funding. KINBER is a coalition of Pennsylvania colleges and universities, research and healthcare organizations, and economic development entities.