



The Benefits of Broadband: Connecting Iowa to the 21st Century Economy

by Dr. Don Racheter

There appears to be a consensus that more broadband access, and especially mobile broadband access in currently underserved areas of Iowa, will dramatically improve the lives of our citizens in many ways. In the Public Interest Institute POLICY STUDY, *The Benefits of Broadband: Connecting Iowa to the 21st Century Economy*, we highlight benefits of broadband in the areas of agriculture and commerce, civics, education, family life, health care, and recreation. Potential negatives are considered, but found to be minimal.

Tremendous change has occurred in the last twenty years, and especially the last ten years, in the areas of computers, the internet, mobile devices, and software applications. The next few years promise to have even more rapid change, so long as political roadblocks are not erected to the expansion of broadband capacity. For example, citizens must be vigilant that firms like AT&T and T-Mobile, which want to merge so that they can invest billions of private dollars in up-grading and expanding broadband access, are not blocked by rival firms like Sprint, which has filed objections to their proposal with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and various politicians.

While such self-serving actions are common in modern American political and economic life, they are not in the best interests of the average citizen, particularly Iowans living in rural and other currently underserved areas. Given the budget deficits, there is no hope that government will be able to step in and extend broadband service into such areas at taxpayer expense, and even if they had the funds, bureaucrats do not have the expertise and motivation to do such a job in a timely and responsive manner.

Do we want Iowans to have increased access to up-to-the-minute stock quotations, weather information, commodity prices, and implement parts data? If so, we need to foster, not impede, free-market firms which are willing to invest their own capital in making broadband, and especially mobile broadband, access more available more quickly.

Bankers, insurance agents, car salesmen, implement dealers, hotel/motel operators, antique dealers, store owners, and a myriad of other commercial firms are joining farmers and ranchers in exploring the benefits of expanded broadband. Citizens are using the internet and mobile devices to “look over the shoulders” of politicians and bureaucrats, as well as expand their educational opportunities. Small town libraries are able to use broadband access to make available vast stores of information to their patrons that was previously impossible. Families

A Publication of: **Public Interest Institute at Iowa Wesleyan College**

600 North Jackson Street, Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641-1328

If you wish to support our efforts, please donate by sending a check to us at the above address.

If you wish to donate by credit card, please go to our website: www.LimitedGovernment.org.

PII is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

E-Mail: Public.Interest.Institute@LimitedGovernment.org

Phone: 319-385-3462 Fax: 319-385-3799

which have moved apart are using e-mail and social media to keep in touch and even to share photos and videos of their loved ones.

One very important area of benefit which has come to pass with the expansion of mobile broadband is in health care. People are able to use internet search engines to find out information about the symptoms they are experiencing and what might be causing them. They can consult doctors and specialists from around the world without leaving home. Paramedics arriving on the scene of an accident can also consult with experts to improve the care they give as first responders.

Another area of benefit is the almost limitless possibilities for recreation to fill non-work hours. As with anything, these benefits do not come without cost. Increased numbers of cell towers may be unappealing to the view and may generate radiation which might create an increased health hazard. However, the evidence on the latter is mixed at best, and many ways to disguise the towers have been developed. Improved service does cost more, but may be a better value when considered from a cost-to-benefit ratio.

As Iowans, we are lucky that our “first in the nation” status brings presidential candidates to our communities where we can share our views and concerns on many issues, including the need for expanded broadband and especially mobile broadband access. State and local politicians also are seeking our support by engaging in face-to-face conversations as they run for re-election. If we remember that the answer to the question “who guards the guardians?” is “We the People,” and remember that democracy is not a spectator sport, but rather a system of government in which average citizens get the experts to work for them through hiring and firing them in regularly scheduled elections, we can make the system work for us rather than against our interests.

Public Interest Institute’s POLICY STUDY, “The Benefits of Broadband: Connecting Iowa to the 21st Century Economy,” can be viewed at <http://www.LimitedGovernment.org/publications/pubs/studies/ps-11-5.pdf>.

Dr. Don Racheter is President of Public Interest Institute in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Contact him at Public.Interest.Institute@LimitedGovernment.org.

Permission to reprint or copy in whole or part is granted, provided a version of this credit line is used: "Reprinted by permission from INSTITUTE BRIEF, a publication of Public Interest Institute." The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Public Interest Institute. They are brought to you in the interest of a better-informed citizenry.