

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

People Care about Broadband

Now is more important than ever that every American student, household, business and community be connected to great broadband in order to do the great things that I think are needed in our nation right now. While they may omit it in dialogue or discussion, you're seeing a lot of action and agitation right now in the market; both by public policy and also private capex investment in making sure that broadband is increasing and enhancing the lives of those interest groups that I talked about. Here at Connected Nation, we're a national nonprofit and we work at the lowest level of community organization to make sure that our strong communities beget strong America, and it's part of our mission to make sure that we port that consciousness, if you will, about the importance of broadband infrastructure in almost every facet of community life. So it's something we take very seriously, and it's something we've been able to help move the dial on over the last ten years of our organization's history.

Exciting Public-Private Collaboration

We're really starting to see a very exciting time in politics. There's the Connect America fund, that is a \$4.5 billion subsidy that, where former investments used to go toward traditional voice service, is now migrating to recognize and support that cost challenge on going toward high-speed internet access. So I think between public and private, you're seeing a very exciting time for this, what you'd call *the dream* for ubiquity really starting to come to a head and it's really energizing the work that we do at the community level. It starts by giving voice to that community so that they can be getting their fair share in this investment and making sure that they take advantage and fully leverage this investment both from the public and private side.

Michigan's Success: A National Microcosm?

We were proud to, in 2008, be someone who very early started to measure what human impact and economic impact is from single-dollar-type investments into broadband infrastructure. And citing that report there in Michigan that we published in the last couple of weeks, it's estimated that even a 1% increase in broadband penetration could create or save approximately 12,000 jobs in Michigan alone. So you can imagine the exponential impact when it is construed at the national level. There's always going to be cost issues that have to be entertained and debated, and I think what we try to do is remain technology-neutral and policy-neutral but I think we can all agree that advancing the discourse from an educated point of view, to show things like the return that is brought by that type of investment I think you'll find in Michigan and international research that suggest that we can't afford not to make these types of investments, both

on the policy side that foster it but also in the activism from the communities and the capex investment from the private industries.

Government Funding Makes a Difference

Connected Nation is actually one of the largest participants in what's being called the "State Broadband Initiative." It's a Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information grant program. It was part of the over \$7 billion broadband investment that was brought about by the ARRA, and one of the largest. So 56 entities participated in this SEI portfolio; Connected Nation is one of the largest grant recipients, and considering the timing of that, we worked tirelessly before the passage of that omnibus bill to get the Broadband Data Improvement Act through Congress and that really brought attention to the need and value in making such investment. When the Stimulus Bill came around and funded it, it basically brought us to an unprecedented scale overnight. I've got to tell you, the impact of that one single investment has been tremendous in the communities we serve.

Connected Nation's Mission

At Connected Nation, we're a national nonprofit and we work in over 30 states and territories, currently. We believe that states and communities, families and individuals can realize great economic and social advantages when we accelerate broadband availability in underserved areas and un-served areas as well. I want to make that distinction between un-served and underserved; they're both challenges and they're ultimately the fronts where we bring our intervention. Ultimately what we do is we seek to, from a market demand perspective, bring awareness to the benefits of a connected life, and then from a supply side we try to make sure that communities are aware of their opportunities. Our mission doesn't rest until there's ubiquitous supply, and I think you're starting to see that life demands that ubiquity and access and not just in access alone but in the insatiable need of more apps and content online that enhance American life. You've got to have continual investment and upgrades in the robustness and the rigor of those networks.

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