

Focus on Broadband Stimulus Funding & Responsibilities

Moderator: Nicol Turner-Lee, Vice President and Director, Media and Technology Institute for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Panelists:

Derek Wyatt, Labour MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey

Dorothy Attwood, Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Chief Privacy Officer, AT&T

Brian David, Program Director, Adoption and Usage, National Broadband Task Force, FCC

Howie Hodges, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs, One Economy

John Carr, Secretary, UK Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety

The panelists agreed that there are clear economic advantages to ensuring that everyone has access to broadband. Moreover, citizens who are not able to access the Internet are unable to take full part in essential aspects of society including education. The panelists were in agreement that the government must play a role in providing a framework for rolling out broadband. The panelists also discussed the current state of broadband adoption in the United States and England and shared a number of programs that have been successful, including providing computers to English schoolchildren, using the Internet in low-income housing, and involving youth as digital educators.

David shared the progress the Federal Communications Commission has made on the congressional mandate to deliver a broadband plan. He noted that the United States is one of the last major countries to create this kind of plan. There are three primary sections of the plan including deployment, national purposes intersection with broadband (like healthcare, education), and adoption and usage. He suggested that it is no longer just an advantage to be online and that those who do not access the Internet face high costs like being unable to apply to certain jobs, access important health information, or take full advantage of educational opportunities. David previewed possible solutions that the plan may recommend including a national digital literacy corp., a private partnership with service providers and the education community, universal service reform including funding through Lifeline and Link Up, a national help desk, and a broader awareness campaign akin to the DTV transition campaign.

Wyatt then shared the current state of England's broadband initiatives. He stated that 10 million people are not online and suggested that broadband access should be a universal service like electricity. He described an effort to encourage the government to define broadband as at least 2 mbs by 2012. Wyatt said that making an economic case to the government has been effective including the statistic that if all digitally excluded people make only one Internet exchange each month, the government will save \$1.4 billion. He also described an initiative to have 400,000 volunteers adopt families to help with digital literacy. In order to provide funding for training, he suggested taxing ISPs 75 cents a month or encouraging ISPs to offer every family a free year of Internet.

Carr stated that approximately 20 percent of children attending state schools in England do not have access to the Internet and that they are left out of the conversation and stigmatized as poor. He claimed that it is the policy of government that all English state schools should have access to the Internet, but cautions that children are harmed by government-funded broadband, then the government will be blamed. He suggested that children should be made aware of the risks of

being online so that they can deal with these risks. He agreed with Wyatt that in order to get money to fund Internet programs, an economic case must be made to the government and that there are clear economic advantages to ensuring Internet access.

Attwood suggested that it is clear that there are advantages to broadband, but it also emphasized the problems of the physical world. She commented on the amount of innovation that occurs on the Internet and the importance of keeping children and private information safe. Attwood stated that because everyone has a different experience when connecting with the Internet, especially now with the number of mobile handsets available, it is important to ensure that consumers have more tools to give them the confidence to present themselves online.

Hodges said that the Internet brings the “oxygen” that allows people to do powerful things. He claimed that it is important that Internet is available, affordable, and that people understand its value. He shared an example of how the Internet was being used to bring together families living in low-income housing communities and how people must be literate in order to take advantage of the benefits of the Internet. He also explained how young people play an important role by acting as technology ambassadors. Hodges suggested that government can revise and reform universal service to include broadband, could mandate a housing policy that requires public housing to have free Internet, give preference for Broadband Technology Opportunities Program funds to organizations that have an innovative adoption plan, and provide tax credits as incentives for adopting the Internet.

Turner-Lee asked what the role of government should be in providing broadband access. David suggested that the FCC should be providing a “vision” and “fence posts” but that government should not be inserted where it does not need to be inserted and that the private sector has an important role in providing funding.