



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Central Appalachia Regional Network and WV Center on Budget & Policy Host Press Conference on WV Broadband Efforts

CHARLESTON, West Virginia (December 14, 2010) – On December 14, 2010, the Central Appalachia Regional Network (CARN) and the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy (WVCBP) hosted a press conference to support and enhance broadband efforts in the State of West Virginia. Specific strategies to help the state advance its broadband deployment efforts – such as the creation of a permanent Office of Broadband Development, as well as targeted tax credits and incentives to offset capital infrastructure costs for smaller telecommunication companies – were provided by CARN and WVCBP.

The Central Appalachia Regional Network (CARN) consists of 22 organizations in the Appalachian counties of West Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Tennessee, and Virginia. In August 2010, CARN convened a summit of over 140 people from diverse organizations in the region. The participants identified Broadband as one of their top three policy priorities affecting the Central Appalachia Region.

Rural communities lag behind non-rural communities in the availability and quality of high-speed internet access. Access to broadband is paramount to improving the economic prosperity and wellbeing of Appalachia and would provide the region access to the benefits of telemedicine, telecommuting, higher education distance learning, improved emergency communications systems, greater connection to the global economy, among other benefits. According to a study titled “Exploring the Digital Nation” released by NTIA and the Dept. of Commerce’s Economics and Statistics Administration, the “digital divide” – unequal access to and adoption of digital technologies – is apparent between rural and urban areas as well as non-minority and minority populations.

Rev. James Patterson, Executive Committee Member of the Central Appalachia Regional Network, discussed the network’s concerns that nationally, West Virginia ranks 45th lowest in number of broadband internet providers and 48th lowest in internet subscription. “The Central Appalachian Regional Network is not concerned with a spat between telecommunication companies. What CARN is concerned about is the availability of affordable high-quality broadband for the citizens of central Appalachia in general, and at this point in history the citizens of West Virginia in particular,” stated Rev. Patterson.

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Paul Miller, Policy Analyst for the WV Center on Budget & Policy, discussed the broadband policy opportunities available to West Virginia, specifically the implementation of the broadband grant funded by the National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA). Paul Miller is the author of the policy paper, “Reducing the Broadband Gap in West Virginia.”

“The challenge of universal, affordable and high-speed internet in West Virginia can be met. West Virginia can adopt significant and meaningful policy reforms to improve the demand and supply of broadband technologies. Leadership and effective management can guide West Virginia into the 21st century and improve our position from the bottom fifth into the top five in the country,” said Miller.

Both CARN and the WVCBP provided specific strategies to help the state advance its broadband deployment efforts. Recommendations included:

- Implement West Virginia’s 126 million NTIA grant
- Open access of the NTIA funded middle-mile network to all providers
- Establish state funded Digital Literacy Program
- Reform Federal Universal Service Fund
- Create a permanent Office of Broadband Development
- State legislate 200 percent of the federal poverty level and below to qualify for broadband subsidy

Access to high-quality affordable broadband is a critical to improving the economic prosperity and wellbeing of Appalachia. The Central Appalachia Regional Network and the WV Center on Budget and Policy will continue efforts to advocate equal access for all West Virginians.

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The Central Appalachia Regional Network was formed as part of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Rural People, Rural Policy Initiative – a multi-year national initiative – based on the premise that “rural America has abundant assets and that the brightest potential for rural America emerges when a critical mass of rural people are stronger, more organized policy actors.” Visit www.CARNnet.org for information.

The West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy is a policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. It focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low-and moderate-income families. Visit www.wvpolicy.org for more information.