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## **We have a bright future, with the right broadband policies**

**Friday, April 27, 2007**

**By Chuck Muth**

The Internet, for all its amazing growth to date, is just beginning to reach its full potential. The people and businesses of Nevada will best realize the infinite possibilities of the 'Net if government officials get with the program when it comes to increasing high-speed, broadband Internet access.

"American residents and businesses now pay two to three times as much for slower and poorer quality (Internet) service than countries like South Korea or Japan," Robert McChesney and John Podesta wrote last year in *Washington Monthly*. "While about 60 percent of U.S. households do not subscribe to broadband because it is either unavailable where they live or they cannot afford it, most Japanese citizens can access a high-speed connection that's more than 10 times faster than what's available here for just \$22 a month."

Think about Nevada's senior citizens. Increased and affordable broadband service, coupled with advanced telemedicine applications, could allow virtual doctor-patient visits over the Internet. Broadband could save U.S. seniors billions in health care costs, while at the same time providing better care due to the ready access telemedicine could provide seniors to medical specialists all over the country ... maybe even the world. Or think about the Nevada businesswoman who works for a corporation in California or New York. She could maintain a residence in Nevada and do her job from home by telecommuting - - relying on broadband to quickly and securely transport the reports and analyses she develops for her customers, colleagues, and bosses.

Experts say telecommuting could result in \$3.9 billion in annual time-and-fuel cost savings, while reducing traffic (I'm looking at you, Spaghetti Bowl!), greenhouse gases and dependence on foreign oil.

Then there are Nevada's small, home-based businesses. Because of broadband, none of their online customers need know that their office is in the garage or their inventory is in the basement. Thanks to the speed of broadband connections and low overhead costs, such home-based businesses can compete with the "big guys."

These possibilities and opportunities will only develop and increase if investment in broadband networks continues apace or accelerates. But that will require government policies which encourage -- not throw a wet blanket over -- additional broadband development and growth.

When telecommunications companies first began offering broadband services in Nevada, only the most tech-savvy consumers demanded faster speeds to surf the 'Net. The average consumer was perfectly satisfied with what are now considered the intolerable delays of dial-up service.

But today, even the most casual users feel the need for speed. They want their Internet connections "always on," standing ready to retrieve the local weather forecast or check their bank balance -- and fast.

Plus consumers today, in rising numbers, are using greater and greater amounts of bandwidth. Video streaming through popular Web sites like YouTube is but one example. If

Nevada is going to respond to rising consumer demand for more broadband networks with faster speeds and more capacity, then the state needs a regulatory climate that continues to be friendly toward investment in broadband networks and ongoing innovation. The last thing Nevadans need are bureaucratic speed-bumps on the Information Superhighway.

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