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## Comments from a Small Rural Community on the Canadian Border In Northern Minnesota

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*We are a rural community in Northern Minnesota that has provided internet services for ourselves for 14 years. We started in 1995 with assistance for start-up capital costs from federal, state and local resources in response to the fact that no commercial provider wanted to provide local dial-up internet access to rural communities like ours. We see the BTOP program as the next generation of this very viable concept. The following are components of a successful BTOP process from our point of view.*

**Empower Individual Rural Communities** - The system that is used to distribute the BTOP grants should empower individual rural communities to develop sustainable networks for themselves. The process of building these networks is part of the value of installing them. The process motivates communities to take a look at who they are and articulate what they would like to see for the future. Through the process of building the network themselves they have to educate their community members about what it is and why it is important. Ultimately this creates more informed consumers who feel a sense of ownership and have a stake in seeing it succeed.

**Local Ownership Builds Firm Foundations for Rural Communities** – When the network is locally owned and operated rural communities have more influence on the quality of service and service offerings. Local ownership maximizes the retention of jobs and revenue within the community.

**Block Grants are NOT a Good Idea** - Distributing the BTOP funds through block grants to the States would be an ineffective way to catalyze local communities to build sustainable solutions for themselves. Block grants would promote in-fighting at the state and local levels. The decisions should remain at the federal level.

**Highlight Good National Models** - We have an opportunity to build some good national models for the future and build them right. There is obviously not enough dollars being granted to fix all of the rural broadband problems in the Country. We believe that these funds ought to be used to build a smaller number of complete



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and sustainable broadband projects rather than spreading the funds thinly across broader areas. Such complete projects can be the models for future communities to solve their own broadband problems.

**Maintain High Bandwidth Standards** - Do not bend to pressure to dumb down the bandwidth standards. If this takes place, rural America will be behind again in a few short years and have to go through this process all over again. The standard should include capabilities rather than numbers. Consumers should be able to access two-way high definition video connections for all users in their home.

**Support the Institutional Needs of Education, Health Care, Libraries, Smart Grid for Rural Electricity, and Public Safety as Critical Local Assets** - These highly valued institutions are in a position to be anchor tenants in community-wide solutions. This factor can be a critical component of a locally sustainable solution. Stimulus funding for these institutions should be targeted locally to allow them to be leveraged as components of comprehensive community broadband solutions.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted by:

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