

Hello, Rep. Botzow,

Here are my follow-up comments on my testimony of 2/18/15 before the House Commerce committee:

Did you think my testimony on H.117 advocated for a return to 'public utilities' or state monopolies for wifi? Not so. As attractive as a monopoly might be for getting things done, that was not the point of my remarks. My point was to infuse the existing system with a strong sense of purpose and design, to achieve a speedy completion of the network and an efficient deployment of network resources.

At this seminal point in creating VT's wifi network, an entrepreneurial sense of purpose is needed - if not in structure, then at least in spirit. Robert White of AOT may have hit the nail on the head in his testimony. [He spoke while you were on the House floor during the hearing.] The member to your right at the table asked him, "How do we staff the Dept?" to which Mr. White replied, "It's now "how", but "who". The kind of people you staff the Dept. with is key." In this time of urgent infrastructure build-out, leadership with ingenuity, intelligence, focus, and vision will best achieve it.

You wouldn't hire ten different builders to build your house. If you did, you'd hire a contractor to oversee and coordinate them all. The state of Vermont is trying to build a 'wifi house' with scores of private companies, each with their own separate projects and agenda. Who acts as 'contractor' to coordinate all those activities? THAT was my concern in my testimony. This state, so short on population and revenues, has only struggling companies and limited resources with which to create and weave a wifi infrastructure. Thus it's all the more urgent to use these scarce resources wisely and efficiently.

In my testimony, I glibly suggested that Dept of T/C change its name to one that would better reflect its job. The best I could come up with is: Department of Telecommunications Systems. This name says the Dept is responsible for the creation of one continuous infrastructure network [system] in the state, woven from many separate parts, the smaller regional systems. And it will still be a fitting name after those 'systems' mature. In 2015, Vermont is building many disparate 'highways' and connectors of information. All these little 'roads' must eventually meet up and form one seamless network throughout the state. To my mind, "and Connectivity" is too squishy and vague, doesn't get the objective across.

I realize that Vermont has peculiar wifi challenges other states don't have. We are a small, spread-out population, with plenty of pesky hills and trees, and a small budget. Vermont requires more infrastructure per capita to reach all users. Because of these factors, Vermont will always play catch-up. Maybe 'smarts' can overcome Vermont's many challenges and we can come up with adequate coverage for all. Or maybe we simply need to redefine what 'success' looks like. In focusing too much on the 'last mile', we may miss the boat in other new technology for the many. We need to know when 'enough is enough', what's realistic.

If we must cover every single 'last mile', can Vermont use revenues from companies renting VT AOT's fiber lines to finance 'last mile' build-out? If 'last mile' coverage is indeed the state's primary objective, then the Dept must insist that 'last mile' projects be built out first, BEFORE any other infrastructure is deployed, and provide incentives if necessary. This does not appear to be happening. It seems that tower projects are going in anywhere and everywhere, with no rhyme or reason, other than that the State [or the feds] declared towers to be a good thing, and so they get built. The public resents this aimless approach because it appears dishonest: Identify a nice popular objective [wifi for all], but build something else [towers for companies to enrich themselves]. The state should make public their priority list of 'last mile' projects and hold telecom companies to it. How much 'last mile' coverage have telecom co's actually delivered in the past 2-3 years? They're putting up a lot of towers! Towers the telco's erect for their own ends should not be approved until they build the needed 'last mile' facilities. The state must prioritize the deployment of infrastructure in order to reach its goals. Maybe for every one [or more] last mile project, a telco gets to build one 'non-last mile' project.

"Deploy infrastructure intelligently." This must be the guiding principle of the Director.

Thank you,
Respectfully,
Marge Garfield
Calais