Utilities Technology Council™

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Utility Broadband Deployment

Background:
Since 1999, three years after the U.S. Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been required by law to examine on a yearly basis whether broadband internet is being made available to all Americans. In the 22 years following the First Broadband Progress Report, the FCC has published thirteen different broadband deployment and progress reports, each showing a steady and continuous decline in the number of Americans lacking affordable access to broadband internet. Moreover, with new funding opportunities and programs for broadband deployment becoming available, it is expected for every American to have access to affordable, reliable, and resilient broadband internet.

Issue:
In its recent Broadband Progress Report, the FCC estimated that only fewer than 14.5 million Americans lack reliable and affordable high-speed broadband internet.[i] However, studies have shown that this number is being grossly underreported, with over 42 million Americans lacking reliable broadband internet.[ii]

UTC Analysis
Due to 40 million Americans lacking affordable broadband internet, energy utilities have stepped into the role of providing and bringing high-speed internet to these underserved and unserved parts of America. By leveraging their existing transmission and distribution networks, most if not all energy utilities are able to provide the infrastructure necessary to support both the middle-mile and last-mile broadband deployment. These utilities are also able to use their sophisticated private communications networks to bring broadband internet access to their communities and millions of American families that live in unserved or underserved parts of America.

For investor-owned energy utilities like Dominion Energy, Southern California Edison, and American Electric Power, they use their transmission infrastructure to deploy middle-mile broadband networks, which support the deployment of reliable and resilient broadband internet. Moreover, these utilities also provide local, non-traditional service providers and local public power and cooperative utilities with the necessary interconnections needed for last-mile broadband deployment.

As for public power utilities and cooperatives like Kitsap County Public Utility District and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, they have used their existing distribution infrastructure to provide critical last-mile fiber-optic broadband service to their communities. By doing so, these local utilities provide more cost-effective and feasible service opportunities to their communities and those living in unserved and underserved parts of the United States.

The Utilities Technology Council believes that all utilities play a vital role in bringing broadband connectivity services to the millions of Americans and families living in unserved and underserved parts of the United States. UTC encourages and supports federal, state, and local regulations that encourage utility involvement. UTC finally opposes rules and laws that impede or at worst, prohibit utility broadband service.

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[ii] https://broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-broadband-overreporting-by-state