

## Testimony for the Senate Utility Committee

State of Kansas

February 4<sup>th</sup> 2016

In looking at the overall health of the rural economy the thriving areas have access to broadband that assist in creating economic opportunities. The Kansas rural ILEC's have invested in the tools to attract and create business growth in Kansas. From the perspective of rural Kansas the investment by the rural ILEC's have brought millions of dollars from national programs that have begun to close the digital divide, and frankly have given Western Kansas the tools to compete worldwide. You may ask, "What these millions of dollars have meant to rural areas?"

I am the Economic Development Director for Norton County in Northwest Kansas and the Nex-Tech fiber network has allowed our community to expand businesses, grow entrepreneurs, and compete with other states for recruitment.

**Manufacturing:** Norton County relies on over 250 manufacturing jobs that touch the world economy. Our manufactures have been able to use the fiber network to compete for bids that previously were lost contracts due to the inability to be responsive. This fiber network can be attributed to our manufactures' success in that they are able to react to volatility in the markets. With access to broadband they can more easily break into new markets. These manufacturers have added over 30 jobs to the Norton County economy over the last two years, largely due to the ability to compete in a global market.

**Entrepreneurs:** Norton County has been blessed with a furry of entrepreneurs that have built businesses that contribute to the balanced economy we currently have. These entrepreneurs are located all over the United States and are looking for that big break. Norton had adopted many programs that have attracted entrepreneurs such as the ROZ and E-Community a program from Network Kansas and the factor that has allowed them to stay is the availability of the fiber network. Norton County was able to start a business incubator model that is credited with the success of a service business. The business benefited from the fiber network because there was not available extra staff when the business opened.

**Recruitment:** Norton was successful in attracting an internet sales business from Texas. The future success of small business recruitment to Kansas could be immense largely because of the availability of broadband. We were successful in attracting a Norton alumnus to move his business "back home" and become a contributor to the Norton economy through the creation of jobs and funds added to our property tax base. The ease of him doing business in Kansas was most attractive.

**Evolution of Agriculture:** It is hard to imagine a time where technology was not present in agriculture. The broadband network runs this industry and the efficiencies yield dollars to contribute to a positive cash flow. The Ag industry can now make decisions in real time to sell

commodities, purchase inputs, manage irrigation and scout crops to control disease just to name a few. I am also involved in our family farm and with the limited time I am available, I have been able to manage our farming operation from my office phone.

Efficiencies are naturally created with access to a robust broadband network. As we look to the future and see the real possibility of reduced funding available for community development and essential services, efficiencies will allow us to survive and in many cases thrive in changing economic times.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Sproul

Norton City/County Economic Development