

Wireless Broadband and Colorado's Growing Hispanic Community

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The face of rural America is rapidly changing. Historically, the Hispanic population in the United States has been heavily concentrated in urban areas, and to a large extent, it still is. However, the number of Hispanics in rural areas has increased significantly in the last decade as this community seeks to expand its horizons for employment, affordable housing and business opportunities.

In Colorado, the Hispanic population has grown by 41 percent since 2000, according to recent data from the Census Bureau. And the 2010 Census counted 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States, making up 16.3 percent, or one-sixth of the total population. The South, in particular, experienced an explosive 57 percent increase in its Hispanic population (four times the growth of the total population in the South), while the Midwest saw the Hispanic population grow by 49 percent (more than twelve times the growth of the total population in the Midwest).

Take, for example, Alleghany County, at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. The Hispanic population there skyrocketed 89.4 percent from 2000 to 2010, compared with 4.5 percent overall growth in the county. That area, for instance, offers an attractive lifestyle and growth industries in health care, serving the needs of a retired population. As this urban-to-rural migration occurs, accelerating deployment of advanced mobile broadband networks to rural and hard-to-reach areas across the nation becomes increasingly relevant to the Hispanic community.

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The benefits of broadband are life-changing. Broadband helps people learn new skills, improve their education, find jobs and contribute to the growth of the economy. Government services are more accessible and convenient. Telemedicine reduces patients' time off work and out-of-pocket expenses. According to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) June report entitled *Bringing Broadband to Rural America*, "The distance-conquering benefits of broadband can be a catalyst for community development and economic growth, among other benefits, in America's more remote small towns, rural and insular areas, and Tribal lands."

As evidenced by the FCC's National Broadband Plan and its more recent rural report, the agency is hard at work on a number of initiatives designed to facilitate the deployment of reliable and ubiquitous broadband service. The FCC should also consider private industry solutions that will help ensure rural America has access to the latest and most innovative offerings that wireless broadband provides. The proposed combination of T-Mobile with AT&T is one such solution, and one that would greatly and positively impact rural America.

AT&T has committed to the FCC that it will offer Long Term Evolution (LTE) - the premier next-generation wireless broadband technology - to more than 97 percent of the U.S. population within six years after the merger. That means 55 million more Americans will have wireless broadband than will have it without the merger. AT&T has publicly stated that it will invest \$8 billion to fund this LTE expansion, which will come entirely from private capital, without any government or public subsidy.

The expansion of next-generation wireless broadband envisioned by this transaction is transformative and exactly what rural America and the Latinos that live there need. It will enable immediate access to critical education tools for rural teachers and schoolchildren, who may travel further distances to reach school.

Telemedicine applications through broadband, including remote monitoring, are important for rural areas with a shortage of doctors or where patients have to travel long distances for consultations. Mobile broadband also is vital to public safety in rural areas, as residents will have better information about impending disasters and emergencies and will have more reliable means of communication.

State-of-the-art wireless broadband is essential to economic competitiveness, job creation and quality of life in Rural America. These benefits will remain beyond the grasp of tens of millions of rural Americans, including the large number of rural Hispanics, without the build-out of a true high-speed wireless broadband network that the merger promises.