

By Hunter Newby



## “We Can’t Wait”... For Dark Fiber

On June 14, 2012, President Obama signed an Executive Order...”to make broadband construction along Federal roadways and properties up to 90 percent cheaper and more efficient.” President Obama’s message to America, and the world, was “We can’t wait.”

This action begs the question, what are we waiting for?

Waiting implies that we do not have whatever it is. The fact that we are waiting also means that we need it, or else we wouldn’t need to wait for it. Finally, the words can’t wait mean that there is a high level of urgency in obtaining whatever it is we are waiting for. This isn’t some passive thing, or a nice-to-have. It is a must-have.

So, what is “it”, and why must we have it?

As the President puts it, “Building a nationwide broadband network will strengthen our economy and put Americans back to work”. What the President is saying is that the U.S. does not have a nationwide broadband network. This is a news flash for most, but a dirty little secret for the subscribers and operators of the slow networks in America.

Delving in to the semantics is a tricky business, and trying to understand the definition of words and terms is largely a tool used on the battlefield in lawyer-land. Manipulating definitions is clearly a tool turned weapon for most states, which have recast broadband to be defined as some very low, sub-megabit, speed at the behest of the incumbent telecom and cable operators that employ so many voters in the state. They do so as they wish to protect their home turf and ability to control the pace of change and their need to invest in proper infrastructure. This state-level manipulation is contrary to the economic health of the country and has now been publicly noticed by the President.

Speed, as in kilobits and megabits per second, has historically been a metric for defining broadband, but allowing the definition to exist at this level has exposed broadband to the constant manipulation it lives under. The true measure isn’t in the word broadband, but rather the word infrastructure. Infrastructure does not have a speed. The word conjures up images of buildings, steel, bricks and glass. Combining broadband and infrastructure brings to mind pieces of networking equipment and more importantly, how they are connected – fiber.

Looking more closely at the Executive Order President Obama has signed we can see that he has specifically called out the need for broadband infrastructure and his contribution to solving the issues of not having it and the

urgency in getting it built is to make the federal application process for rights of way more efficient and cost effective. So, basically what the President of the United States of America is saying is that we need more fiber built everywhere in the country to create jobs, drive the economy and that rights of way (dirt, land – the foundation of infrastructure) are essential in getting that done.

President Obama, you are correct! For those of you who still believe there is a fiber glut in America, sorry. This is its epitaph. Hopefully it is safe to say that the fiber glut myth is dead, but if anyone continues to wish that all is well with dark fiber availability in the country, please check your mobile device at the door. You obviously are not using it, so you must not need it, and if you do not understand the relationship between fiber and wireless then you really are not qualified to have an opinion on the state of broadband infrastructure anyway. Now it is time to get on to facing reality, dealing with facts, making a plan and building the new America. **IT**

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