

Transcript: Libraries and Broadband: Panel Three: MOVING FORWARD

April 17, 2014

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: So our third panel is really all about moving forward. This panel will discuss solutions for robust connectivity in libraries, some great ideas about that. And we'll be hearing from Gary Wasdin, Eric Frederick and Linda Lord. Gary is the Executive Director of the Omaha Public Library System and has had a long career in libraries and also is currently a member of the Urban Libraries Council Executive Board. Eric Frederick is the Executive Director of Connect Michigan and Linda Lord, the famous Linda Lord, our Maine State Librarian. You know, IMLS has a very close relationship with all of our state libraries out there. Hello state libraries and we have one of the premier state librarians with us here, Linda Lord, who is also a Chair, I think, of the ALA E-Rate Task Force. So we're glad to have all of you today and we'll ask you to make your remarks and then we have some good questions for you as well. So, Gary, would you start out. Thank you.

MR. WASDIN: Thank you, Susan. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. Asking me to do this in like five minutes is like putting me in front of a buffet and asking me to only eat salad.

(Laughter)

MR. WASDIN: So I'm going to try to stick to four key points in my remarks here. First, just a quick overview of some of the issues we face in Nebraska and in Omaha. I've been in Omaha for four years so it's been new to me and it's been a learning process. We're a mid-sized city, about half a million people but nearly a third of the population of our state lives in Omaha and Douglas County. We have lower than average unemployment in that part of the country and certainly in Omaha and our economy has been much more stable over the last few years. However, that really breaks down as you start to look at specific groups and specific audiences in our community. Clarence mentioned earlier about minority populations and how they are affected much more significantly by the economy and by employment issues and that's extremely true in Omaha. We are largely a rural state. Omaha has 12 libraries. The rest of the state is primarily smaller libraries, many of whom just got internet access for the first time through the very successful BTOP program. In our community, though, we play a very strong role in education and learning with our Omaha Public Libraries. That's been even more significant over the last two years as we've been working on a IMLS grant designed to really reinvent our library system as a community engagement tool to help build our city and help grow our city's economy and to help people strengthen their lives, their skills and improve their circumstances. In doing so, we've been working much more strongly with our business community which has really transformed how we see technology and the need for through our library system. We are the only access point for internet in Omaha that is free so our computers are heavily used. Our wifi is even more heavily used and that grows exponentially each year. Omaha has a very strong business town. We have five Fortune 500 companies there and workforce development is one of the most critical things that has emerged through our grant research and working with our community. We've created a bit of a circumstance. It's an enviable position to be in in many ways, but through this community engagement work, what we've have found is a community that desperately wants us to be engaged with them and they want us to be a leader when it comes to technology education, when it comes to skills development. Many of our larger corporations are finding

that they have to look outside the city to bring in skilled workers who have the digital skills that are necessary for our part of the country, on particular, individuals who can write code; and don't ask me, I don't know what coding is but I now that it's necessary. And our companies are having to bring in individuals who have that skill set and it's a skill set that's not terribly difficult to learn. IT doesn't require a formal education. It's something that if individuals are given the access and the ability to learn, there's a job waiting for them on the other side. So we've been asked to look at what we can do with building those skills. Just this past Friday, actually, some very sad news. A small company, a tech startup that grew in Omaha, and some of you may be familiar with it -- their company is MindMixer -- it's a company that creates online town halls for cities who are looking for information, community engagement-based research from individuals in their communities -- unfortunately, they announced that they're leaving Omaha and moving to Kansas City and they're doing so quite simply because they cannot find enough workers to meet the demand in Omaha. Now Carla asked earlier how do we get the attention of elected officials for the need for libraries and digital instruction. That's how we get their attention. We have to say "This cannot happen again. We cannot lose another company for this reason." Now we've already started on a lot of this work and it continues. We recently employed lynda.com which is available in all of our libraries. This provides instruction on computers in any one of our 12 libraries on all kinds of topics. It's self-paced. It includes software skills, design skills as well as management classes, leadership classes. People can come to the library. There are video instructor-led programs that really help them build a skill set that heretofore may not have been accessible to them. We offer GED classes in the library which gives us the opportunity not only to work with partner agencies to help people prepare for the GED exam itself but also to help them get comfortable using computers since the GED test now is done on a computer. We don't want them to be sitting there for the first time using a computer and having to face such a difficult test. The Affordable Care Act was one of our most recent technology bubbles in the library system. For the last two months, for signup, over 1000 people came to our libraries to find out more about their insurance options and to sign up for insurance. This was a wonderful example of who people come to libraries not just for a computer and not just for internet access. They came to us for the support. As someone mentioned earlier -- I think it was Chairman Wheeler that talked about the "guide by side" help -- people who even had internet access needed help. And we were fortunate to have trained volunteer navigators there to help people navigate the system, to get online and to use the programs that were available. Now for the future -- what is the future? I don't know. None of us know what the future is for technology. We know it will be different. But what we're doing in Omaha is creating a technology incubator library. This is a space that will give us the opportunity to experiment, to try new things, to see what works, to see what our community needs and to see what doesn't work. And we'll be able to do that in a space that's independent from our other libraries but very much connected and a part of our libraries. We're doing this with the wonderful of a philanthropist in the city and through the public-private partnership that makes these things possible. Earlier, we talked a little bit about Carnegie and that public-private partnership and it's something that I rely on and where E-Rate funding helps me tremendously. In talking to our philanthropic community in Omaha, the very first thing they want to know is what is the government doing, what is the city, what is the state, what is the federal government doing to help libraries before they will step up with their private support. So E-Rate helps leverage those private dollars to help makes these things possible. In our incubator, we'll have the opportunity to have a space that lets us offer after-school programs that

teach youth creative skills, programs that help them learn to design and create and edit content, higher end software for job skills for people who are applying for jobs and doing more. As we look to launch this space next year, we're excited to take all of the research that's been done by our partners around the country using the Edge initiative that's come from ULC, the great research that's come out of Pew over the last few years and create a space where we can put those in practice and see how they fit in our Omaha community. Thank you so much for this opportunity to talk and I'll turn it over to Eric.

(Applause)

MR. FREDERICK: There's a very narrow platform up here. Director Hildreth and Members of the National Museum and Library Services Board, thank you for the honor of speaking today on the importance of broadband for libraries and the modernization of one of its major funding vehicles, E-Rate. I'd have to agree with Gary that asking me to do this in five minutes is a very difficult task but we have talked today a lot about stories and telling stories of the services libraries provided to their communities and that's what I'm here today to do. I want to give you a little bit of a background, though, before I start into those stories. As Susan said, I am the Executive Director of Connect Michigan. We are a non-profit subsidiary of Connected Nation partnered with the Michigan Public Service Commission, and our task is to facilitate the expansion of broadband and technology access, adoption and use throughout the Great Lake state. We are Michigan's expression of the State Broadband Initiative administered and funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. So thank you to the NTIA for the opportunity. Over the last four years and in concert with a lot of the other work that all SBI programs are doing throughout the country, including broadband mapping and research, we have been implementing the Connected Community Engagement Program, and this is a robust and grassroots effort to bring together local stakeholders around the idea of broadband technology at a very small scale, assess their local broadband landscape, identify gaps in that assessment and help them develop a very actionable technology plan for filling in those gaps. Over the last two years, we've engaged with 27 communities across the State of Michigan, doubled the amount we were required by our federal grant and have engaged 1300 cross- sectorial stakeholders in that process. Team members on these local teams include chambers of commerce, economic development corporations, schools, local government, broadband providers and, of course, the libraries. We have seen firsthand through the Connected program the critical role that libraries play in Michigan communities and, of course, communities throughout the country. Libraries serve as an access point to the limitless resources of the internet and, of course, are catalysts for adoption. Services offered by libraries are some of the key points that we look at when doing our local broadband assessment through the Connected program including public computer center hours and digital literacy classes. We have countless stories to share regarding best practices and successes coming out of our Connected program and if I were to shake my sieve of best practices, the ones that float to the top are from libraries. So I do want to share some very specific stories from Michigan communities and the impact that they're having in broadband and technology. In the Eastern Upper Peninsula Bayliss Library System, they became a hub for students to access the internet once the local system provided students grades 7 through 12 with a laptop because of the BTOP program. However, the vast majority of these students did not have an at-home broadband connection so libraries advocated for expanded parking lots. They increased their bandwidth and extended their

hours to meet the needs of these students. And in communities with active broadband and technology planning teams, many Michigan schools with one-to-one device programs are working in tandem with libraries to ensure there's adequate bandwidth, hours of operation and capacity to meet the increased community demand for high-speed connectivity. Libraries across Michigan also contribute significantly to local economic development efforts partnering with local chambers of commerce and economic development corporations to host website and social media development training for small businesses. Michigan's economy relies quite heavily on these establishments and again, those are businesses with 20 employees or fewer. However, research has found that Michigan's small businesses are less likely to adopt broadband than larger establishments and small businesses in other states. In response, in the winter of 2013, members of the Luce, Chippewa and Mackinac County Community Technology Planning Teams that have engaged through our Connected program partnered with libraries and chambers of commerce to train 140 small businesses on e-commerce and website development so that they may leverage technology to sustain and grow themselves in rural Michigan. Along those same lines, Michigan's harbor communities are greatly dependent on the summer months when local tourism swells -- anybody is with the Pure Michigan campaign. Seasonal tourists on working vacations that require ongoing communication with employers via email and Cloud computing find Michigan's libraries in their small coastal towns to be ideal secondary offices away from home. Modern technology in these libraries allows visitors to experience Michigan and contribute to the local economy for longer periods of it me because they still have sufficient bandwidth to telecommute. Libraries in Harbor Springs, Petoskey, Frankfort, Traverse City, all up and down Michigan's west coast are packed with these types of folks in the summertime being able to bring their families to northern Michigan and enjoy the environment. As we've experienced through our work on the ground in Michigan, libraries that are engaged with a broader community technology planning program are developing creative and innovative solutions and programs and methods to help solve community connectivity and adoption issues. E-Rate reform offers an unprecedented opportunity to prioritize and incentivize applications from libraries that are part of a broader community technology plan. Libraries in rural Michigan are seen as gems in their community. Susan mentioned earlier about bringing libraries to the forefront of people's minds and these broader community technology planning teams are absolutely doing that, bringing the libraries back to the forefront of the minds of local government officials and to schools and to economic development corporations for the role that they play in connecting everyone in the community. Public-private partnerships and concurrent infrastructure construction are just a few examples of efficiencies produced from collaborating and collaborative community technology programs. Libraries play a critical role in broadband access and adoption in Michigan communities, not just for the digital literacy skills of individuals but for those of businesses that are making Michigan communities thrive in these tough economic times. Thank you again for allowing me to come today and to share some of the stories and successes of Michigan's libraries. Thank you.

(Applause)

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: The final speaker is making her way up here, Linda Lord. Thank you so much, Eric. That's good.

MS. LORD: Good morning, everyone. I am in awe at being here today with so many distinguished people including some old friends. What a pleasure. Thank you IMLS. Thank you Board. I don't know where Commissioner Hundt is but hearing him speak in a few minutes is one of the thrills of my being here today. I learned a phrase here in DC a couple of years ago which seems incredibly appropriate: "Everything has been said but not everyone has said it" and I'm sure you haven't heard it in a Maine accent, so here I go and I wanted very much to yell "ditto and ditto" after Gary and Eric spoke. I certainly enjoyed their comments. The American Library Association has advocated for high-capacity broadband in libraries since the beginning of the E-Rate Program and I'm always so proud to mention that my former Senator, Olympia Snowe, was essential, was critical in getting this program into the American Telecommunications legislation of 1996. ALA, recognizing the importance of E-Rate for libraries early on established an official E-Rate Task Force that closely monitors and responds to FCC proceedings within the Washington office. And I am so pleased to work with these people at ALA who are so supportive of the Task Force's work. There is no question but that E-Rate has transformed the way libraries and schools function to better serve the needs of patrons and students. And from my perspective in Maine, it has been an incredibly successful program. However, after nearly 20 years, even a successful program should be assessed to make sure that it's focused on meeting today's connectivity needs. Therefore, ALA supports the fine-tuning of the program and creating efficiencies wherever possible. However, I do caution that in the changes being contemplated we first do no harm. In March, the FCC released a public notice and I'll share a few details, as I've been asked to, from the ALA responses. First, ALA believes its proposals address some of the greatest challenges our libraries have in reaching the kinds of broadband speeds they need for today's and tomorrow's services. ALA wants to focus on places where high capacity broadband is not available to libraries and where if it is available, it is not affordable. ALA wants to also study high-bar for library broadband targets. We believe that this should occur with scalable technology instead of continuing in incremental improvements. We envision all libraries at one gig by 2018 if not earlier. As an aside, in Maine, our goal for 2015 is one gig to 99 percent of Maine's schools and libraries. And I want to interject here that Maine had all its schools and libraries connected to the internet in 1997-1998. We connected them to a 56k line with a FRAD -- does anybody know what a FRAD is anymore -- frame relay access device -- and we truly thought we were in hog heaven. And a poor Cisco rep came to meetings and said, "You got to be thinking about servers. You're going to be" -- ah, nah, FRADs are great. We've got it made. Well, obviously, that has changed as rapidly as changes in some of the other states that you have heard about earlier. And I just read the wonderful report from IMLS and the FCC yesterday to learn that Arizona, South Carolina and Maine maximized use of the E-Rate Program, and not being competitive or anything, I thought, "Well, why isn't Maine first?" But then I realized alphabetical order they listed it in, so I calmed down after that one. But we do maximize our use of the E-Rate Program and I would love to explain how we do that but there's no time for it. If anybody's interested, I'll be glad to talk your ear off on what's going on in Maine. Now, 29 percent of state libraries say that a majority of their libraries lack adequate bandwidth now and 92 percent say that most of their libraries will need more bandwidth within three years. I did a quick survey in Maine a couple of weeks ago asking what libraries would do with broader bandwidth and within a few hours, I had 51 replies, some from libraries I never hear from begging for broader bandwidth, which I thought was fascinating because we think we do a pretty good job at providing what they need and obviously, I learned. Because broadband is so critical to libraries, ALA recommends using a portion of the FCC's \$2 billion dollar, I

believe it's called down payment, to immediately increase library broadband and ALA has three main proposals. The first is called "The Scalable Technologies Deployment Program" that would apply to libraries in close proximity to providers who can offer speeds of at least 100 megabytes up to our one gigabyte goal. ALA thinks this project could identify ways to keep ongoing costs affordable and might be the catalyst for providers to expand into areas where there is little competition. The second proposal would promote school wan partnerships. If school has a broadband connectivity, then the library close to it has. Why not have the library link off that school's broadband? And when ALA first mentioned this, I said, "Isn't that legal now" because we're doing it in places in Maine. And thank goodness the response is yes, that's perfectly acceptable to do now. Apparently, it's going across public ways that presents the problem. The third and final project calls for network diagnostics and technical support. This project would maximize the cost-efficient use of E- Rate funds and help smallish libraries. It could include bulk purchasing and would rely on support from state libraries who have trained E- Rate coordinators who have a statewide perspective on the status and connectivity needs of their libraries. And I do want to recognize IMLS for allowing LSTA funds to be used for continuing education. That is a huge support and very critical and I would be remiss without recognizing the Gates Foundation. My very fast act in working for the Maine State Library was going to a training session to get computers into Maine libraries and what a difference it made. Two other suggestions from us to streamline the processes. You've heard that before. And we fear down the road that overall program funding is going to have to be increased. I will tell you frankly that phasing out support for voice services has been a contentious issue for the Task Force and for many libraries across our country, particularly for our small and rural libraries. And some of the issues we have weighed in on or we've discussed include what to do in cases of emergency or in areas where alternatives to telephone may not be reliable or affordable. I did another survey for my poor libraries who I surveyed right to death and they were split right down the middle on this, whether or not losing POTS would damage them. And I got the most touching note from one library. It was a large library with a gigabyte connection and they said, "Yes, losing POTS support would hurt us because we take in a couple thousand dollars a year because we have all these lines coming in. However, we know how much other libraries need broadband so we would vote to spend the money on broadband." That just amazed me that that library had the big perspective and was aware of concerns across the state. We, ALA, does support a very gradual phase- out of voice services but I emphasize very gradually for the reasons I just mentioned. Finally, I'd like to bring this back to where this matters and you've heard this. Libraries touch all aspects of life from education, employment, entrepreneurship, to empowering people in all stages and from all walks of life. When people can't apply for jobs or access government services because they don't have access from home, public libraries must be there for them. Where else are they going to go? Police station, town hall? I don't think so. Public libraries are it. And I guess I want to conclude we've heard so many statistics, we've heard so many goals, but to bring it right down to what Gary did, we're talking about the lives of tens of thousands of individual people whose lives are being enriched by broadband in our public libraries and that's the key point I want to leave with you. We're not just talking abstractions, policy, data and goals. We're talking about people's lives. The final point is that we don't know what the next new thing is going to be. Are all our patrons going to come in in a year wearing Google glasses, bringing their iPads, their computers, their iPhones? We don't know but whatever it is, we do know it will involve bandwidth and that library patrons will expect that their libraries are ready to provide it and that it works well at the library. We can't allow

inadequate bandwidth to limit the services that our libraries can give their communities. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: So thank you, Linda. That was great. You know, I think most of the folks here in the audience know what POTS is and I was listening to you, Linda, and I almost heard "pot." And I thought, "Why is the FCC supporting pot in libraries? But P-O-T-S, Plain Old Telephone Service, just to clarify. I mean it would be fun if we had pot there as well, but Plain Old Telephone Service. Okay. So we have a couple of questions. We're trying to stay on time, watching our clocks but our first question comes from one of our Board members, Christie Brandau who I also want to just acknowledge has been a state librarian and has been involved in these E-Rate issues in both Michigan and Kansas for sure. I'm not sure about other states but Christie, I think you have a question for Gary.

MEMBER PEARSON BRANDAU: Gary, you mentioned that E-Rate helps leverage other dollars. How does it directly affect and support your library? What are some of the challenges you've experienced with the current E-Rate program? And how would you suggest that it changes to better serve your community?

MR. WASDIN: Well, as I said, it is key in leveraging other dollars which helps us really magnify what we're capable of doing. But in a library of my size, the money that comes in through that really, without it, we wouldn't be able to provide the service period. The cuts that we would have to make to offset the loss of that funding would be significant. You know, the challenges, I think, many of them have been mentioned already with the complicated process that's involved. And just as an example, in a library of my size with a limited number of staff and especially with staff with limited expertise in this area, we, for instance, actually have to pay a consulting firm to apply for E-Rate funds for us. So we actually have spend some of our money to even apply to get the funds. It's worth it for us, of course, but that's how challenging the process and the time involved is doing it. And that's true, really, throughout Nebraska. So I think as far as how it would change, I think looking at how we could make this an easier process to get the money where it needs to go and ensure that it's spent smartly.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Thank you, Gary, and Eric, you know, you spoke -- you had some very compelling stories but talk a little bit more about how you think the public-private partnerships have really impacted community planning efforts and E-Rate modernization? I think it's a great example to have the public-private work going on. And has it really made a difference in your point of view?

MR. WASDIN: Yeah. I think it actually has. We find in tough economic times, particularly in rural Michigan, in communities that have been hit the hardest, that public-private partnerships are just a way of life now. No single entity can stand on their own so when we bring these teams together around broadband and technology, natural collaborative models come to the top. Again, it's libraries talking to schools, talking to chambers, talking to economic developers. And we've even seen in one community where a separate inter-governmental fiber rings, library systems and others actually joined together to provided increased bandwidth for everyone, signed on rural local governments to that system for increased efficiencies and then expanded that system and leased it to a private sector provider to serve rural townships in a county that was the most under served in Michigan and now has a sustainable

broadband connectivity. So those public-private partnerships are definitely a way of life, forced a little bit by the economic downturn but are definitely showing dividends in a lot of the communities we work with.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Terrific, great. And Christie, did you have another question?

MEMBER PEARSON BRANDAU: Yes, for Linda. Linda, we're both from states that have a lot of rural libraries that rely on E-Rate and POTS to serve the community they have. How will these proposals help those libraries that are the furthest behind?

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: And also, Linda, any thoughts about rural areas where we're having challenges in terms of enticing any vendors to make investments at all.

MEMBER PEARSON BRANDAU: Yes, absolutely. MS. CLARK: The lack of competition is a huge problem. Some of you know that I live in a small Maine town, I'm proud to say really in the "willywacks" and there's no cable TV, there's nothing except one telecom provider and that's a very difficult thing. The other -- Christie, the first part of your question was?

MEMBER PEARSON BRANDAU: How are the proposals going to help the libraries that are the furthest behind? MS. CLARK: Oh, because they're definitely, deliberately focused on those libraries and there would be a way to determine -- the way hasn't been figured out yet as I understand it -- but there would be a way to determine which libraries desperately need to be in a pilot project to get that connectivity.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Okay. We want to try to keep our efforts here on time, so I'm not -- we have a couple of other questions. Some of them we've gotten answered but there was one question, "Are there any studies of actual experiences of low-speed versus high-speed libraries in terms of service quality and variety?" And I think this is a really good question I hope that possibly Chairman Reed in his closing remarks could address that. But I think one of the challenges, you know, as we had that -- as you said, Linda, "It's all been said but not everybody said it," so we all know that for the most part, it's really bad out there and we have to get this connectivity better. But I think the real challenge is do we really understand and can we imagine what it would be like with better connectivity. And even if we had it, we're still not there because the next day, something new will come along. So it is amazing to me that 50 of our main libraries -- I'm sure some of them are pretty small -- could right away come up with uses for increased broadband. So we know that's where want to go. So I would like to thank our panel and ask you to step down and just we really appreciate your efforts.

(Applause)