

## **Rep. Sloan Attends Telecommunications Conference**

Rep. Tom Sloan (R, Lawrence) participated in the national Emerging Issues Policy Forum: Digital Pathway Summit 2016. Commissioners from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) joined telecommunications providers, state and local officials, consumer advocates, and others to discuss where the nation's high-speed Internet/broadband deployments and policies are today and should be in the near future. Rep. Sloan was one of ten state legislators invited to participate. He was selected because of his work in Kansas and as a member of the FCC's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee.

Particular attention and discussion was devoted to "Bridging the Homework Gap," situations where K-12 students are assigned homework, but are unable to complete the assignments because the students do not have access to broadband at home. This is a particular problem for rural residents and low income urban families. The Lawrence Journal World recently highlighted problems the Lawrence School District has experienced.

Other major topics discussed included: "Expanding Broadband in America" to more rural and lower income urban residents, the FCC's proposals to change the "Lifeline Program" from one that supports voice only to one that supports broadband services that include voice, and the "Gigabit Opportunity" in communities that see the highest broadband speeds.

Rep. Sloan's comments at the Summit focused on several aspects of national and state telecommunications deployments: 1) that governments have a legitimate role in helping citizens receive broadband for economic, health care, and education purposes in those situations where telecommunications providers' business plans do not include reaching everyone within their service territory; 2) protecting individuals' privacy from cyber threats must be a greater priority for governments, businesses, schools, and other organizations; and 3) that competition between broadband providers is the most reliable way to ensure that such services are affordable, reliable, and available. Sloan further emphasized that access to broadband in rural areas is more than just being able to use a wireless phone, it is the capability of Americans to benefit from distance education opportunities, innovative health care delivery systems, and for their farms and businesses to engage in national and international economic transactions.

In addition to many schools replacing textbooks and handwritten or typed assignments with electronic materials, many job applications and applications for government services must be filed electronically. Those Americans who cannot access computers and the Internet are at a competitive, and hence economic, disadvantage. Telecommunications companies and suppliers will soon be making 5G (5th generation) devices available with more applications and capabilities than ever before. "It is

imperative that all Kansans have the opportunity to participate fully in the digital age. Failure to ensure access to broadband services for all will mean slower economic growth, lower educational achievements, and less healthy citizens,” Sloan said.

Rep. Sloan is Vice Chairman of the Vision 2020 Committee and a member of both the House of Representatives’ Transportation and Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees. He is serving his 11th term in the Legislature and serves on numerous national committees addressing energy, telecommunications, and water issues.

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