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***Proponent Testimony of House Bill 2701
Establishing the Statewide Broadband Expansion Taskforce***

**Testimony by CenturyLink
John Idoux, Kansas Governmental Affairs Director
Before the Senate Utilities Committee
March 20, 2018**

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Please refer to CenturyLink's Introductory Testimony dated March 11, 2018 for a general introduction of CenturyLink including CenturyLink's commitment to rural broadband deployment and current challenges faced in deploying broadband further into rural Kansas.

No Taskforce Can Solve World Hunger

There is near-universal agreement that broadband is a vitally important service and that there are areas of the state lacking sufficient broadband. There is very little agreement, however, on how to define lack of sufficient broadband let-alone on how to best address the issue. For starters, the "digital divide" means different things to different people. Some argue the digital divide refers to rural/urban availability while others refer to the term as low-income challenge. A small city may have broadband availability but view increased capacity as a strategic factor. In short, the digital divide includes availability, adequacy, affordability, adoptability, accessibility and acceptability – and all combinations of these factors.

There are also over 50 providers offering broadband services in Kansas using a combination of strategies and technologies. Yet a digital divide still exists in Kansas and the reasons are as varied as the providers, the communities and the needs of every resident and business. CenturyLink and other providers continue to trial different approaches, strategies and technologies all in an effort to reduce deployment costs and bridge the digital divide but the obstacles and challenges for the 50-plus providers vary greatly and prevent a one-size-fits-all solution.

A Narrower Focus May Result in Better Solutions

CenturyLink was initially concerned that the scope of the taskforce may have been overly broad to develop workable solutions; however, with the amendments offered in the Senate Commerce Committee the taskforce may be better suited to develop workable plans. Each taskforce member will have a different and unique perspective on the goals of the taskforce because each taskforce member will have a different and unique perspective on the definition of digital divide. CenturyLink suggests that with the modified focus and charge of the taskforce, the taskforce will be better suited to take the following issues under consideration:

- define broadband;
- define served, unserved and underserved areas as used for purposes of the taskforce and which are under review by the taskforce;
- define rural, non-rural and urban areas;
- define area (county, city, census block, something else);
- define what a qualified network is – wireline or wireless, fiber only or copper knowing that bonded-pair, vexing and vexing over bonded pair significantly extend the reach of copper;
- determine if it is necessary to first map and/or identify the unserved and underserved locations as defined;
- determine if the taskforce is to examine adoptability issues including but not limited to low-income, skills gaps and needed computer literacy;
- determine if the taskforce is to examine both rural and urban broadband deployment or if urban issues would best be resolved at the local level.

Conclusion

CenturyLink has been – and will continue to be – a strong partner at the discussion table on how to advance broadband. CenturyLink would welcome participation to serve on a statewide broadband taskforce in Kansas and would work with all taskforce members to ensure a productive final report with workable recommendations. If the Committee desires to proceed, CenturyLink urges the Committee to consider the above comments.



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Before the Senate Utilities Committee
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**Testimony by CenturyLink
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Before the Senate Utilities Committee
March 20, 2018**

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