

February 26, 2013

Chairman Greg Walden  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Ranking Member Anna Eshoo  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Dear Chairman Walden, Ranking Member

Dear Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, Members of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology:

My name is Christopher Thurow Sr. and I am a resident of the State of Florida. I represented Bradford County Florida on the board of the North Florida Broadband Authority since its inception in 2009. I also served as the chair of the technical operations committee for the same. Bradford County has since withdrawn from participation in the program. I have more than 35 years of experience in in both the public and private sector, currently serving as Director of Information Technology in Bradford County Florida. I am providing my personal experience with the North Florida Broadband Authority which is a BTOP recipient and I am not representing any party other than myself.

The North Florida Broadband Authority was awarded a grant to provide ubiquitous middle mile gigabit broadband connectivity. More than 28 million dollars have been spent to date on this project and it is questionable if the recipient matching portion of the grant has been met.

There have been numerous miscalculations as to the intent, delivery, planning and funding for this particular BTOP program. Allegations of waste, fraud and abuse led to NOAA withholding funding and eventually led to the NTIA recommending the removal of the general manager, the legal firm and the grant compliance company that were managing the entire project. The investigation is still underway at the Office of the Inspector General. Seven of the original fourteen counties have withdrawn from the NFBA.

Currently the program has an estimated five thousand to twelve thousand dollars month total revenue. This revenue is not from the targeted middle mile users but is primarily end users that the NFBA has provided both equipment and installation at no charge to the user. Anchor institutions may comprise of 5-10 of these connections. The anchor institutions that were provided service had broadband capabilities already through the private sector.

The grant required sustainability to be met by January 31<sup>st</sup> 2013.

A low estimate of monthly expenses for the NFBA would be in the vicinity of three-hundred thousand dollars a month.

The NTIA program office has constantly modified program rules to accommodate the recipient however grant non-conformity persists. Indeed, at the expense of the grant the NFBA has hired a full time “lobbyist/law firm” to parlay with the NTIA and NOAA to make certain virtually all costs are grant eligible.

After no less than four “cost and sustainability studies” the NFBA late last year spent another one hundred thousand dollars on consulting fees to generate more of the same. The NTIA clearly wanted to hear about revenue sustainability and it didn’t mind spending taxpayer money to get the answers they were looking for. At this very moment the NFBA is spending taxpayer money on yet another sustainability study.

The revenue model is untenable thus the NFBA has clearly failed in its intended objective.

Christopher Thurow Sr.

Morrison, Florida