

Sloan Attends FCC Advisory Committee Meeting

April 19, 2016

Rep. Tom Sloan (R, Lawrence) participated in the recent Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Intergovernmental Affairs Committee (IAC) meeting. Rep. Sloan is one of three state legislators on the IAC and is the longest serving legislative member.

IAC members were briefed by FCC staff on such issues as: the broadband label – what Internet speeds are appropriate and necessary today; lifeline reforms and the program modernization – federal program to help lower income consumers afford broadband service; and public safety issues – cyber security efforts.

IAC members also reviewed the outline of policy opportunities for the FCC to address tower and other infrastructure needs in the country. The FCC has encouraged telecommunications providers to co-locate equipment on towers, rather than each company building its one tower to serve only its customers. This encouragement has been successful in terms of reducing the blight of multiple towers serving customers of several telecom companies in the same geographic area. However, problems remain with gaps in service areas meaning that millions of Americans do not have access to reliable and affordable broadband services, especially in rural and lower income areas. As tower technologies evolve from tall towers to micro-towers that can be placed on buildings and street light poles, colocation of equipment becomes more difficult. Ensuring that consumers have access to broadband must be balanced against public safety needs to guarantee that pole integrity is not diminished and small towers do not become an urban blight.

Rep. Sloan is drafting a section of recommendations related to encouraging federal programs to support telecommunication companies' investment in towers to reduce service gaps and to promote policies that encourage telecom companies to utilize multiple technologies within their system (e.g., fiber and fixed base wireless) to cost-effectively reach more customers.

"The President, Congress, FCC, and state leaders have all said that providing high speed Internet service to all Americans is a priority," said Sloan. "That has been one of my objectives as a policy-maker in Kansas. While progress has been made, there are still tens of thousands of Kansans who do not have access to reliable, affordable broadband services at speeds necessary for telehealth and education services, and business development. The goal of the IAC policy recommendation is to provide guidance and encouragement to the FCC to develop programs to address the digital divide."

The IAC's policy recommendations will be provided to the FCC Commissioners and staff in late May.

Rep. Sloan is Vice Chairman of the Kansas House of Representative's Vision 2020 Committee that under his leadership has studied telehealth delivery opportunities. He is also a member of the Transportation and Agriculture & Natural Resources Committees. Sloan also serves on the Dept. of Energy created GridWise Architecture Council and the Electricity Advisory Committee's Energy Storage Subcommittee. He has hosted federal, regional, and Kansas leaders on energy, telecommunications, and water policy issues many times to facilitate federal-state-regional collaboration policy-making and program management.

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