

Submitted by: Dr. Anne Temte, President, Northland Community and Technical College

May 27, 2010

RE: Minnesota Broadband Bill

On April 26, Governor Pawlenty signed the “Minnesota Broadband Bill.” The bill outlines goals for the state that must be fully satisfied by 2015. The bill states that all Minnesota residents and businesses should have access to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of ten to 20 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of five to ten megabits per second. The second part of the bill stipulates that Minnesota be a leader in broadband service: one of the top five states in the nation for broadband speed universally accessible to residents and businesses, one of the top five states for broadband access, and one of the top 15 when compared to countries globally for broadband penetration.

Although the bill identified broadband goals, the plan did not contain a budget for implementation. This spring, IMPACT 20/20, a group of Northwest Minnesota leaders from across industry sectors, joined together to encourage the Federal Communications Commission to expand and extend the current Universal Service Fund model to include broadband accessibility.

This leadership group endorses the Minnesota goals and believes that the Universal Service Fund is key to reducing the high cost of installing the necessary infrastructure. The Universal Service Fund has a successful history in underwriting the cost of telephone service, especially in sparsely populated rural areas where the cost of putting in telephone lines would not have been feasible without it.

I was one of the IMPACT 20/20 volunteer regional members who signed a letter which the group sent to the Federal Communications Commission this past February, urging the commission to include broadband in the Universal Service Fund as part of a new, national broadband plan.

IMPACT 20/20 members see affordable, high-speed broadband as a critical component of Northwest Minnesota’s rural economy and believe that national policies should support development and deployment of broadband service in sparsely populated, high-cost regions such as Northwest Minnesota. Without national policies that support broadband, this region and other similar rural areas across the nation will increasingly be at a disadvantage in growing our opportunities for healthier economics.

About IMPACT 20/20: *IMPACT 20/20 is a group of senior executives and elected officials who joined together in the fall of 2008 to develop a collective action plan for the economy of Northwest Minnesota. Participants included seven of the region’s business leaders, three public college presidents, two tribal chairs, two officers of utility cooperatives, two presidents of healthcare institutions, two directors of economic development commissions, two directors of workforce development organizations, one school superintendent, one director of a K-12 service cooperative, one president of a foundation, and one state commissioner. For more information, visit www.impact2020.org.*