

# BUNKIE RECORD

Bunkie, LA

Weekly (Thur)  
Circ. 1,000

January 20, 2005

## Broadband is the right step

Dear Editor,

Recently, the President said that he wanted to bring universal access to broadband to all Americans within the next few years. This is certainly a step in the right direction, but one that can only be achieved if the government frees all companies in today's communications marketplace to invest freely in bringing new advances into more communities. And, for rural American educators and students, a modern telecom law cannot come a moment too soon.

To someone who truly cares about education, it is heartbreaking to see rural communities deprived of the benefits of the telecom revolution, just because of outdated government regulations. This situation hits rural libraries and educators especially hard, as they struggle to provide students with the tools they need to succeed in today's world. Without the same ability that urban students have to readily access resources from around the world - From the Library of Congress to the galleries of the Loure - our rural students continue to fall behind. Furthermore, there are many bright young people in areas like ours, whose potential is limited only by their access to advanced-placement classes, which are now available through broadband connections.

Rural libraries want to give local residents and students access to the same technology available in more urban areas. With the potential of today's communications technology, this goal is entirely feasible. Unfortunately, government micromanagement of the telecommunications industry has slowed investment that could bring needed technology to rural areas.

In the old world of one company, one choice, heavy regulations protected consumers. But in today's world, these legacy rules are hindering more than helping. Consumers have unprecedented choices now, from phone service or the Internet to e-mail from cell phones and other wireless devices and who knows what innovation is next. A new telecom policy must reflect this new reality. Modern reforms that allow all companies to compete and invest without the wet blanket of outdated rules would advance rural education by encouraging investment in the infrastructure that brings these information opportunities into every community.

Under the existing Telecom Act, local phone companies have little incentive to update infrastructure to bring the 21st century to places like LaPlace. Quite the opposite, incumbent local telecoms are forced to share their investments with competitors at government-set rates that do not even cover cost. The result? Neither side has much reason to invest in more robust networks.

Continuing advances in telecommunications-driven education hinge on more vigorous investment. As the nation's telecommunications systems migrate to broadband, so do the innovations and opportunities they bring. Let's hope that President Bush's goal is the start of a new era in which U.S. policy encourages needed investments, rather than deters it. Only by allowing all companies to compete and invest freely can rural residents be assured ready access to the full range of 21st century information opportunities.

Kathy J. McWaters