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FCC broadband plan includes closing digital divide

By Pepe Lozano

The Federal Communications Commission is set to unveil a sweeping proposal tomorrow to overhaul the U.S. broadband policy in order to bring affordable, high-speed Internet connections to all Americans.

The plan could be stalled if the FCC can't find the funding, corporate support or legal clearance to move forward. Part of the goal is to increase current Internet speeds as well as provide web access to 100 million Americans.

A coalition of consumer groups and public interest advocates is specifically urging the FCC to include increased access to underserved communities.

The coalition includes: the Consumer Federation of America, Media Access Project, Public Knowledge, Consumers Union, New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative, and the Free Press. They are proposing the following recommendations:

- Increasing U.S. broadband adoption of networks at "world class speeds" to 90 percent by 2020;
- Substantially improving the level of competition between providers of broadband Internet access by the end of 2012;
- Establishing real consumer protections for broadband customers within 12-18 months;



- Implementing new broadband data collection standards and rules for utilizing that data in market analyses by the end of 2010; and

- Quickly, establishing rules protecting open markets for speech and commerce on broadband networks.

According to a recent report by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration the overall use of high-speed Internet has

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increased, yet there's still a dramatic digital divide in America. While Black and Latino access has risen significantly over the last few years, access to high-speed Internet remains uneven particularly in low-income, rural and minority communities.

Asian non-Hispanic (67.3 percent) and white non-Hispanic users (65.7 percent) are more likely

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to have broadband in their home than Black non-Hispanic (45.9 percent), Hispanic (39.7 percent), and Native American/Alaska Native users (42.6 percent).

Civil rights groups argue the federal government must address the problem given the serious consequences the result could have for disadvantage minority groups especially as computer skills become increasingly important in all aspects of American life.

The wide disparity in Internet access is quickly becoming a matter of grave social and political importance where more than 40 percent of all homes are not connected, critics charge.

Many households use antiquated 'dial-up' technology, analysts note, and as high-speed Internet becomes increasingly expensive, middle- and low-income families are less able to afford it.

"The digital divide extends beyond connectivity," explains Megan Tady in a Color Lines article last year. "Many people don't have the training, skills or equipment to get online, or they live in an area that has been redlined by Internet service providers who find little incentive to build

out to their communities," she writes. "No matter how many companies enter the market, the fight for customers in high income communities will always be more rewarding for the industry than providing access to low-income communities."

However many note the FCC's plan could mark the biggest opportunity to restructure and regulate the way American's access the Internet.

The FCC will make a series of recommendations to Congress aimed at spurring the ever-changing communications industry to bring more and faster online services to Americans as more turn to the Internet to communicate, pay bills, make travel plans or for news and entertainment. The FCC also wants to make sure that anchor institutions - government buildings, schools, libraries and health care facilities - get speeds of about 1 gigabit per second by 2020. FCC officials say some of the goals are "aspirational" and should be viewed as a "living, breathing" document for the next decade in hopes of helping 93 million Americans without broadband get connected.



Pepe Lozano writes for the People's World.

Lessons from Chile

By PW Editorial Board

Chile's earthquake was 500 times as powerful as the one that hit Haiti. Yet, although Chile suffered extensive material damage and over 700 deaths, the destruction is far less than in Haiti, which suffered over 222,000 fatalities. The population of Chile is about 16 million and that of Haiti about 9 million.

The difference is explained by the relative poverty of the two countries. The annual per capita gross domestic product is \$1,500 in Haiti, and \$10,500 in Chile. Chile's greater wealth has enabled it to prepare better, with more strongly and scientifically constructed buildings and better communications, coordination and emergency response systems. Haiti has not been able to afford these things.

Yet some on the right twist history to draw specious conclusions. Echoing the late right-wing economist Milton Friedman, they claim that Chile's relative wealth is due to its years under the right-wing dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew socialist President Salvador Allende on Sept. 11, 1973, and ruled with an iron hand

until 1991.

In reality, Chile has been one of Latin America's wealthier countries for a long time, and has had a strong political left which has fought for protections for workers and the poor. Under Pinochet, although foreign and Chilean capitalists prospered, the gap between rich and poor increased greatly and has not yet been reversed.

Plus, Chile's strict building codes, which are also given credit for reducing the earthquake's damage, were passed in 1972 under the Allende administration.

Protection from natural disasters requires a government response based on human solidarity. We saw the effect of a lack of solidarity following Hurricane Katrina. In fact, the Latin American nation that copes best with natural disasters is socialist Cuba. Cuba has been terribly battered by hurricanes. Yet each time a hurricane hits, at most a handful of Cubans die, and Cuba has provided emergency aid to numerous other countries in distress.

This, and not the free-market nonsense of Milton Friedman, is the lesson.



Protection from natural disasters requires a government response based on human solidarity.

Women call for urgent action on Illinois budget

By John Bachtell

Illinois is broke. Failure to act will cause obscene and immoral cuts in aid to education and human services. Shame on every elected official who refuses to lead us through this terrible crisis," warned Maria Whelan, director of Illinois Action for Children.

Whelan joined 245 other women leaders representing civic, political, trade union, religious and advocacy organizations March 15 who jointly issued a call for urgent budget and tax reform to avoid catastrophic cuts. Illinois faces a \$13.8 billion deficit brought on by the economic crisis and one of the most regressive tax systems in the nation.

The leaders were marking Women's History Month by sending a letter to Gov. Quinn and the state legislature demanding action. They were specifically responding to Gov. Pat Quinn's budget proposal, which includes \$2 billion in spending cuts, including \$1.2 billion in cuts to primary and secondary education.

Quinn called for an across the board tax rate hike of 1% to cover the education cuts, which he said would result in the layoff of 17,000 teachers. Quinn also proposed nearly \$5 billion in borrowing to cover the budget gap.

"We can no longer wait," said Kathy Ryg of Voices for Illinois Children. "We have come to agree on the size of the problem - the state has a \$7.5 billion revenue shortfall and over \$6 billion in unpaid bills - and a framework for dealing with it."

The women leaders reiterated the cuts would devastate the most vulnerable populations.

Nancy Shier of the Ounce of Prevention Fund noted the ongoing budget crisis and non-payment of bills is already having a huge impact. The budget will cut 40% from mental health programs.

Since 2010 is an election year, Democratic



legislative leaders are fearful of enacting a tax increase without Republican support.

The Republican candidate for governor, Bill Brady, has called for a 10% across the board budget cut and cuts in taxes. This proposal has been widely criticized, including by many in his own party.

Rich Whitney, Green Party candidate for governor, has proposed progressive tax reform he says will bring in \$16 billion a year. Whitney's plan would increase tax rates but would also provide greater protections to workers and low-income families through the creation of a Family Tax credit and by tripling the Earned Income Tax Credit. It also includes a "financial transaction tax" on speculative trading.

"The human costs will be tremendous if we fail to act," said Anne Ladky, executive director of Women Employed, one of the signers of the call. "We are talking about destroying an infrastructure of human services, early education, and higher education that will put this state at an economic disadvantage for decades to come."

"This gathering is the tip of a mighty iceberg moving toward Springfield. We will not be silent, we will be heard," said Whelan.

Failure to act will cause obscene and immoral cuts in aid to education and human services

Monseratte runs on anti-gay platform

By Dan Margolis

If you hate gay people, vote for me. This disturbing message seems that it could very well be the campaign message of Hiram Monseratte, the former state senator.

Monseratte is challenging Jose Peralta, currently a State Assembly member, for the seat in New York's 13th senatorial district.

An unsigned non-union flier, distributed by supporters of Monseratte, referred to the ousted senator's election rival, State Assembly member Jose Peralta, as "the gay caballero."

On March 4, Monseratte held an anti-GLBT rally outside Peralta's office in Jackson Heights, Queens. Monseratte was the main speaker, along with Catholic and other clergy members.

The rally was in part to target Fight Back NY, which Monseratte and his cohorts called a group of outsiders trying to infiltrate the neighborhood. But City Council member Daniel Dromm of Jackson Heights, took issue with the characterization of FBNY as well as Elyon's statements. He noted that "Jackson Heights holds the second largest gay pride parade outside the borough of Manhattan."

Aside from anti-gay bigots, Monseratte isn't getting much support.

According to Dennis Hughes, president of the New York State AFL-CIO, his organization "will coordinate a comprehensive get-out-the-vote effort, including mailings, phone banks and door-to-door visits to union members. I am confident that with labor's support, José Peralta will be elected." Hughes noted that Peralta has a 100 percent pro-labor voting record.

Cineasta argentino gana Premio Oscar a la mejor película extranjera

By Juventud Rebelde

El premio Oscar a la mejor película extranjera ganado por el filme "El secreto de sus ojos", de Juan José Campanella, hace que todas las miradas de la cinematografía mundial estén volcadas hoy sobre el cine argentino, informa Prensa Latina.

La percepción es compartida aquí por actores, actrices y directivos de la industria cinematográfica nacional, para quienes el lauro podría abrir nuevas puertas a la producción del séptimo arte en Argentina.

Creo que este premio es bueno para todos, manifestó en esta capital el protagonista de la cinta, Ricardo Darín, quien recordó que muchas veces escuchas la fatídica frase: yo no miro cine argentino.

Pero, cuando a alguien no le gusta una película inglesa, nunca dice yo no miro cine inglés, lamentó Darín antes de subrayar que el reconocimiento a El secreto ... ha sido muy elevado. Ojalá sirva para que cambien algunas cosas.

Sobre la obtención del Oscar segundo en toda la historia que merece una película argentina consideró determinante el hecho de contar una historia áspera, dura, sin dejar a un lado el humor ni la cotidianidad.

En ese sentido señaló que las cuatro películas que competían eran ex-

celentes, pero le ofrecían a la nuestra una brecha y era que están inhabilitadas en el humor.

La actriz Soledad Villamil, por su parte, resaltó que el Oscar es un premio sobre todo para Campanella, guionista y director, y un hombre que sabe contar historias de personas ordinarias a quienes les suceden cosas extraordinarias.

Liliana Mazure, directora del Instituto de Nacional Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA), coincidió en que este premio posiciona al cine argentino a nivel mundial por el reconocimiento de Hollywood.

El secreto, añadió en declaraciones a la agencia de noticias Télam, reunía todas las condiciones para ganar un Oscar, por eso apostábamos mucho a esta película, por la calidad técnica, las actuaciones, la amplitud en su temática y su guión.

En opinión de Mazure, la obtención del Oscar abre puertas para que inversores y coproductores pongan el ojo en el cine argentino, que no conseguía un lauro de este tipo desde 1986, cuando ganó La historia oficial.

Norma Aleandro, quien actuó en aquella cinta, compartió también la alegría por el triunfo del largometraje de Campanella y aseveró que este premio le va a hacer muchísimo bien al cine argentino.

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