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***Testimony of House Bill 2701
Establishing the Statewide Broadband Expansion Taskforce***

**Testimony by CenturyLink
John Idoux, Kansas Governmental Affairs Director
Before the House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee
February 14, 2018**

Thank you Chairman Seiwert and members of the Committee. My name is John Idoux and I am CenturyLink's Director of Governmental Affairs for Kansas. I appreciate this opportunity to express CenturyLink's views of House Bill 2701.

Please refer to CenturyLink's Introductory Testimony dated February 5, 2018 for a general introduction of CenturyLink including CenturyLink's commitment to rural broadband deployment and current challenges faced in deploying broadband further into rural Kansas.

No Taskforce Can Solve World Hunger

There is near-universal agreement that broadband is a vitally important service and that there are areas of the state lacking sufficient broadband. There is very little agreement, however, on how to define lack of sufficient broadband let-alone on how to best address the issue. For starters, the "digital divide" means different things to different people. Some argue the digital divide refers to rural/urban availability while others refer to the term as low-income challenge. A small city may have broadband availability but view increased capacity as a strategic factor. In short, the digital divide includes availability, adequacy, affordability, adoptability, accessibility and acceptability – and all combinations of these factors.

There are also over 50 providers offering broadband services in Kansas using a combination of strategies and technologies. Yet a digital divide still exists in Kansas and the reasons are as varied as the providers, the communities and the needs of every resident and business. CenturyLink and other providers continue to trial different approaches, strategies and technologies all in an effort to reduce deployment costs and bridge the digital divide but the obstacles and challenges for the 50-plus providers vary greatly and prevent a one-size-fits-all solution.

Narrowing the Focus May Result in Better Solutions

CenturyLink is concerned that the scope of the taskforce is overly broad and may not result in the workable solutions. Each taskforce member will have a different and unique perspective on the goals of the taskforce because each taskforce member will have a different and unique perspective

on the definition of digital divide. CenturyLink suggests that the Committee may want to take issues such as the following under consideration in order to narrow the scope of the taskforce and improve the likelihood of successful outcomes:

- define unserved and underserved areas as used for purposes of the taskforce;
- determine if it is necessary to first map and/or identify the unserved and underserved locations as defined;
- determine if the taskforce is to examine both rural and urban broadband deployment or if urban issues would best be resolved at the local level.

Expanding Taskforce Eligibility May Result in Greater Input

Many companies operating in Kansas and employing Kansas workers have operations in multiple states and many of the Kansas broadband providers also operate in multiple states. Furthermore, many other states are also exploring broadband issues currently. Limiting taskforce members to residents of Kansas may inadvertently limit the taskforce participation [section 1(c)]. CenturyLink suggests allowing taskforce members be eligible to serve on the taskforce if they either reside or work in Kansas to ensure the greatest amount of input.

Conclusion

CenturyLink has been – and will continue to be – a strong partner at the discussion table on how to advance broadband. CenturyLink would welcome participation to serve on a statewide broadband taskforce in Kansas and would work with all taskforce members to ensure a productive final report with workable recommendations. If the Committee desires to proceed, CenturyLink urges the Committee to consider the above comments.