



Community Connection

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Stimulus means jobs now and in the future



By Mark T. Ansbury, the Knight Center of Digital Excellence

If you're looking for work, the first thing you want to know about the economic stimulus plan is whether a job will be shovel-ready for you.

First, don't be confused by the conflicting analyses from economists on how many new jobs will result from nearly \$800 billion in federal stimulus spending over the next year and a half.

At its core, stimulus spending is about jobs - and jobs today.

Take the roughly \$7 billion earmarked for the construction of broadband systems for high-speed, high-capacity Internet service across the United States.

Here are just two examples of industry sectors where you'll find new jobs as a result:

- **Construction and Maintenance:** Workers will be needed to produce, sell and lay fiber.

Additional workers will be needed to get broadband networks up and running in communities. Once the networks are in place, they will require ongoing work in maintenance and operations. For a comparison, think of the upkeep necessary for roads and highways. These are jobs in our local communities.

Manufacturers will also secure contracts to produce switches and routers. This in turn will open up new distribution channels - and sales jobs - to move equipment from factories to job sites. These are jobs that will affect industries throughout the nation.

- **Healthcare:** Part of the stimulus money will allow health records to be stored electronically and made available to doctors everywhere through broadband. This will help patients because their records will no longer be scattered among various specialists, making them difficult to access. Doctors, too, will benefit by having a complete medical history on patients, enabling more effective care and even remote access for home care, especially helping those with serious illness or chronic conditions.

Once again, jobs will be created to deliver these new services into the future. Software and hardware will be needed to develop electronic databases capable of housing medical records for all Americans. Then these databases will need to be maintained over time.

In addition, people with the right knowledge will need to train doctors and nurses on how to use the new systems. Technicians will be needed to keep the systems running.

These are the kinds of health care projects that are shovel-ready in many communities. They will not only create new jobs but also help to improve the quality of healthcare.

Beyond its impact on construction projects and health care services, broadband deployment will affect innovation and business development. Things we can't foresee will happen. Jobs we've not yet imagined will emerge.

The alternative to forging ahead is falling further behind. The United States already lags behind other developed countries in the capacity and penetration of Internet service. Building a broadband foundation gives us an opportunity to catch up.

Looking back at critical turning points in the development of our nation, we know that the building of canals made a difference, as did the building of railroads, and later, the Interstate highways.

Just as we needed efficiency in the movement of goods, today we need no less in the movement of information.

When our ancestors shoveled to build the canals and railroads, they could not have imagined the future. For all our progress, we find ourselves at the same crossroad - digging for a future we can't yet imagine.

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