

Statement of Jay Maxwell
President, Pixius
Wichita, Kansas
jmaxwell2@pixius.com

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Health Resources and Services Administration

National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services;
Notice of Meeting

Rapid City, South Dakota
June 9, 2009

Thank you for allowing me to appear today and to participate in this meeting. I commend our former Governor, Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of HHS, for convening this forum.

President Obama and Secretary Sebelius have made healthcare reform a major priority for the Administration. In rural America, the distances involved and the lack of specialized services compound all of the healthcare problems we face as a nation. There is a major disparity in the quality of healthcare services provided in rural America as compared to urban America. Those of us who live in rural America should not have to leave our family and our home to receive adequate medical attention. Our young people are leaving rural America because of the lack of critical services, including healthcare.

We must maximize the use of modern technology to bridge the urban-rural divide in America and bring health care to rural areas. Broadband technology can go a long way to bringing healthcare services to rural America.

Let me explain how the use of broadband can bring healthcare services to the entire country.

Remote disease management is a new and effective way to measure and monitor health status in the comfort of a patient's living situation, and to give physicians and nurses access to medical information right away so they can quickly identify any changes that need to be addressed. This method of measuring and monitoring health status is interactive, easy to use, affordable, and can provide vital health information to not only the clinical care team but the patient's family as well.

The goal of remote disease management is to keep senior citizens in their own homes as long as possible and out of nursing and long-term care facilities, as well as to minimize hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and scheduled physician visits. In short, technology is being used to improve the quality of life and reduce the nation's healthcare burden.

However, none of this is possible without access to a quality high-speed broadband Internet connection. While this access is common in urban and suburban areas, it is almost a

luxury in rural America. Is it a coincidence that rural America is also an area that is unserved or underserved by medical facilities and practitioners? Rural America is an area with a population that is aging and placing increased demands on scarce healthcare resources.

Ironically, America knows where the aging live and where healthcare resources exist, but does not know with any degree of accuracy where quality high-speed broadband Internet service is provided. Before we can connect the country we need to know with greater accuracy who currently has coverage. In conjunction with strategic healthcare initiatives, President Obama has called for significant improvements in the availability of broadband Internet service in rural America. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides funding to identify where broadband access is and is not available. I urge HHS and all federal Departments to work together to determine in greater detail, who has service and who needs service. By doing this you will pave the way toward a more effective means of delivering healthcare to rural America.

The economies of rural communities and the lifestyle associated with rural communities are strong barriers to recruiting and retaining physicians in rural America. Salary is often stated as a barrier to recruitment. A study in 2007 by LocumTenens indicates that on average, incomes for rural doctors do not differ significantly from those in urban areas.

In Kansas, 29 percent of the population is classified as rural. Physicians in Kansas are concentrated in urban areas with only 4 % of physicians being located in areas that are classified as rural. Since the providers and services are not located where the need exists, we need to take a different approach to healthcare delivery.

In South Dakota, the most remote areas of the State are the nine Sioux Indian Reservations. The health statistics on the Reservations resemble those of a third world country. The Reservations must be a high priority for broadband.

Remote disease management is one effective solution, but it will only be effective if patients in rural areas have access to a quality high-speed broadband Internet connection. Funding for the improvement of Internet access in rural areas is included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

ARRA funds that will be administered by the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Services (USDA-RUS) are targeted toward telemedicine programs and broadband programs in rural America. Funds that will be administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) address broadband programs for rural America.

We urge HHS to coordinate to the maximum extent possible with both USDA and NTIA to maximize the use of broadband funds with an eye to improving rural health care. Pixius Communications is committed to providing quality high-speed Internet service in unserved and underserved areas. We understand the unique challenges of communicating in rural America. Through partnerships with leaders in the delivery of remote disease management, we use modern technology to bridge the urban-rural divide in America and bring health care to rural areas. We are available to assist HHS in any way possible as you seek practical solutions to the challenge of extending health care in a uniform manner throughout all of the United States.

Thank you.

Pixius is a Kansas based company that specializes in broadband communication in rural area. www.pixius.com