



FOUNDATION FOR RURAL SERVICE

Foundation for Rural Service Congressional Broadband Tour

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Each year, FRS gets to take a group of legislative aides (i.e. Capitol Hill or congressional staffers) out to rural America to teach them about rural broadband and advance their understanding of rural issues by seeing rural America firsthand. This year, our Congressional Broadband Tour took us to South Dakota, where we spent two and a half days driving across the state from Sioux Falls to Rapid City. Along the way, the 15 congressional staffers met with NTCA members who shared their stories of broadband deployment challenges, opportunities, and successes across the state. The group started at SDN Communications, hearing from Rich Coit from the South Dakota Telecommunications Association (SDTA), Greg Dean (SDTA), Mark Shlanta (SDN) and Larry Thompson (Vantage Point Solutions) before touring the SDN Data Center. The next day, the group took a quick tour of Vantage Point before driving to Kimball, SD. In Kimball, they were welcomed by Midstate Communications staff members Mark Benton and Chad Mutziger, who took them to a live cattle sale enabled by Midstate's highspeed broadband. For lunch, the group drove to the Atka Lakota Museum and Cultural Center, which works to promote education and understanding of the Northern Plains Indian culture. In addition to folks we had met already, at lunch we were joined by Mona Thompson (CRST Telephone Authority), Randy Houdek (Venture Communications), Rod Bowar (Kennebec Telephone), Roger Musick (Innovative Systems), Ryan Thompson (Santel Communications Cooperative), and Marlene Bennett (Consortia Consulting). The group chatted with the staffers about the important services that associate members provide to NTCA members, such as engineering, advocacy and billing software. They also discussed the role that Tribal entities play in South Dakota and the unique challenges of providing broadband to Tribal lands. After lunch the group headed back onto the bus for a tour of the majestic Badlands National Park. As the staffers passed through the rural terrain, Kelly Wismer of NTCA and Denny Law of Golden West discussed the unique geography of the state and the challenges of providing broadband in such conditions.

The last day of the trip staffers started the day at Golden West's headquarters where Denny shared about the history and evolution of Golden West as a rural broadband provider, discussed federal programs that enable broadband deployment, and fielded questions about things like experiences with federal agencies on permitting. Then everyone hopped on board the bus again and visited a fiber-to-the-home cutover happening in Custer where they got to see the huge machines cutting through the rock and slate to provide broadband service to the customers in that area. The group ended their trip with a visit to Mount Rushmore and a dinner in Rapid City.

FRS thanks all the telcos and associate members and their teams who helped make the tour possible. The tour is one of the greatest tools we have to share your stories—and we couldn't have done it without you.

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The Foundation for Rural Service (FRS), in cooperation with NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association and its members, seeks to sustain and enhance the quality of life in rural America by advancing an understanding of rural issues. FRS is committed to educational achievement in rural communities, recognizing that tomorrow's economic and civic development depends on the involvement and commitment of today's youth. Visit us at www.frs.org.