

# OPINION

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GUEST EDITORIAL | Todd Baxter

## Feds must stop frivolous broadband funding

It would be beyond comprehension for the federal government to spend taxpayer money to open "Uncle Sam's Burgers" to compete with privately owned fast-food franchises. Likewise, it would be crazy for the feds to build a major interstate without consulting a map showing nearby existing highways and roads.

Taxpayer dollars should not be used to duplicate services or to provide "free" capital to give one company a market advantage over others that have invested billions of their own money to create thousands of jobs for hard-working Texans.

But that, in essence, is what the feds are doing with the \$7.2 billion national broadband stimulus program. Newly released maps show that broadband — high-speed Internet — is widely available in Texas. They also underscore that the broadband stimulus program has been ill conceived and poorly executed by the federal government.



Baxter

That's because the federal government put the cart before the horse.

It gave out more than \$270 million of your money to a dozen projects in Texas before actually determining where current broadband operators provide service. Common sense would say to find out where broadband is, or isn't, available before spending the money.

The feds also should better define "underserved," since the money is intended to help both unserved and underserved areas. It sounds like a riddle — how many broadband providers have to serve a household before it isn't considered underserved? So far that riddle has no answer, and it is costing you, the taxpayer, a lot of money.

Without the data or the definition, how can the federal government make sure it is spending taxpayer money wisely and where it is really needed?

Now that we have the maps, we can see that more than 99 percent of all Texans can access some form of broadband, whether wired, wireless or mobile, from more than 123 providers. Yet — without this information — the federal government awarded hundreds of millions in grants and loans to the Texas projects, with possibly more to come before the broadband stimulus program wraps up in September.

The Texas Cable Association formally objected to seven of the dozen Texas projects, when in the application stage, because the areas addressed are already covered by existing broadband providers. We don't believe the areas are unserved or underserved.

For example, one project that received more than \$78 million in grants and loans plans to serve the city of Falfurrias and other limited areas in South Texas. According to the new broadband availability maps, four providers already serve Falfurrias. How is that a wise investment of your tax dollars?

Instead, a more productive use of the remaining broadband stimulus money would be to focus on unserved areas or on overcoming other barriers to adoption, such as digital literacy or lack of computers or other equipment, where broadband already is available.

As the feds consider a new round of applications from Texas, the Texas Cable Association urges them to make their decisions based on the new Texas broadband availability maps to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not being used to threaten local jobs, harm hard-working Texans and compete against private sector investment.

**TODD BAXTER** is vice president of government affairs and general counsel for the Texas Cable Association.

ANOTHER VIEW | Thomas Twombly

## Money doesn't buy happiness — sort of

As Paul McCartney has been telling us for over 40 years now, money can't buy you love. But there's a new study that suggests money is a down payment on happiness — and not just among Americans. A Gallup survey of 136,000 people in over 132 countries found that most people tend to associate happiness with wealth, a universal standard of success.

In fact, that strong association between income and day-to-day satisfaction with life surprised some of the happiness experts — including Nobel laureates.

And although "happiness expert" is not part of my official title, I have to admit this: The results of the study surprised me a little bit, too.

I've spent 25 years talking to people about their money and helping them make sound decisions on what to do with it. Though happiness isn't an index on their quarterly statements (yet), I have seen that money can evoke alternating feelings of elation, frustration, satisfaction and anxiety.

I've learned a lot about happiness over the years, and only a fraction of it has to do with money. Life is full of riches. Some of the happiest people I know have a lot in common

— and it's not always an 8-figure investment account.

No matter what the markets are doing, happy people put a higher value on six things.



Twombly

■ **Work.** One of my clients retired comfortably from a university career, and then began writing children's books about geology. Sometimes, happiness is the hum of a keyboard or the passionate pursuit of an idea.

■ **Relationships.** At home, at work and in their communities, happy people invest regularly in mutual relationships. And they consider those investments equally as important as their financial investments.

■ **Trust.** At the heart of trust is an ability to share and delegate responsibilities. There's a peace of mind that comes with trust — a great source of those "positive feelings."

■ **Giving.** Happy people give their time, expertise and yes, often their money, to causes and people that are important to them.

■ **Enjoyment.** No matter the source — work, hobby, rela-

## Lawsuits taking fun out of life

If one so-called watchdog group has its way, the trinkets in McDonald's famed Happy Meals will join an ever-growing list of childhood pleasures that have gone the way of the dodo bird, forced into near extinction by lawsuits. It's becoming a rare sighting indeed to see a sliding board or a real swing set in a public park these days. All these childhood favorites are vanishing because of lawsuits.

In this latest foray to stomp out simple pleasures, the Center for Science in the Public Interest claims that the toys in McDonald's Happy Meals are making America's kids obese. Make no mistake, childhood obesity is no joke and serious efforts underway to curb our nation's weight epidemic are appropriate and well-placed. But eating at fast food restaurants — or allowing children to eat at these establishments — is a parent's choice and a matter of personal responsibility.

Federal legislation that requires restaurants to publish nutritional information

about their fare is also appropriate so people can make informed choices. Even so, in a recent statement to the media, the head of CSPI said: "At some point parents get worn down. They don't always want to be saying no to their children. We feel like an awful lot of parents would be relieved if this one pressure was removed from them."

Wow. What a frightening thought: Suing our way out of responsible parenting.

Responsible parents make choices for their children. They may not always make the right choices. But parents who embrace personal responsibility own their choices and their consequences.

If we've arrived in a place in time where junk lawsuits are the only way to curb junk food intake, we're in real trouble. We should be focusing on ways to accept personal responsibility and instill these values in our kids.

**STEPHANIE GIBSON** is executive director of Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse of Central Texas.

