

RURAL BROADBAND INSIGHTS FOR CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



WITH PARTNER JONATHAN CHAMBERS

Co-ops Connect FYI

By Jonathan Chambers • Mar 01, 2024

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Is BEAD For You?



This is the last personal note I intend to write for a while. Next week, I'll return to broadband. **I have written a piece titled, "Maybe BEAD isn't for you,"** which is what a former colleague told me recently when I expressed frustration at the unnecessary regulatory overreach in the program.

To put my former colleague's comment in perspective:

- Our Rural Electric Cooperative Consortium has been the largest recipient of competitive federal broadband funding since 2018.
- BEAD is the largest rural funding program for broadband.
- Unsurprisingly, over half of all BEAD-eligible locations are in electric co-op service territories.

If BEAD isn't for us, then who is it for?

But I know what he meant.

- You have to put up with a lot of crap when dealing with government programs. That “free” government money ain't free.
- **Rural fiber construction** is financially challenging without government interference in efficient business practice.
- Over the past five years, Conexon has built more miles of fiber broadband than any company, more than any company ever.
- Nearly all of it has been integrated into electric co-op distribution networks.
- I believe every co-op could successfully build a fiber network to all its members.
- ***Yet, BEAD may not be for you.***

That's where I'll pick up next week. I hope to see some of you in San Antonio, either at our reception Monday evening or on the convention floor. Until then, I'll be in Israel. God bless.

Staying Vulnerable — A Personal Note



I appreciate the kindness of those who have read and responded to me during a difficult year. I am in Israel to observe yahrzeit, the anniversary of my wife's death.

We all suffer loss. To those of you who have shared your stories of loss with me this past year, I will be forever grateful.

As one friend told me, "You are vulnerable now, and people will feel more comfortable sharing their own pain. Stay vulnerable."

I thought one letter, in particular, was worth posting here. It is from a man who, like me, was raising two sons when he lost his wife in a terrible accident.

“Jonathan, I am holding you close as someone who knows what it is like to grieve the loss of a spouse—your partner, your rock, and your best friend. Judah and Elijah, I know how hard it is for sons to lose their mother. Though the grieving process never truly ends, I hope you can find comfort in what will never be lost: the love you had for her and the love she had for you.

I know that Dana inspired so many by the power of her example, always standing up for the dignity and respect of people here and around the world. Her compassion, wisdom, and guidance brought light to countless lives. As you reflect on the memories you shared with her, know that her legacy lives on through the hope she brought to so many, the goodness she brought to world, and all of you.

I know that the weeks and months after losing a loved one are never easy. Keep leaning on one another and holding each other close. It will take time, but the love you shared with Dana will become a source of strength. May it help you find purpose in living lives worthy of her and all that she meant. **I promise you the day will come when the memory of Dana brings a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye. My prayer for you is that this day comes sooner rather than later.”**

If you have lost someone, that is my prayer for you. Peace.



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