

CEOs discuss ways to bridge digital divide

WASHINGTON (AP) — Regulation and costs may be slowing the pace of offering high-speed Internet access and other advanced telecommunications services to rural communities, say some of the industry's top leaders.

Executives from companies both big and small had the ear of regulators and lawmakers Thursday as they spelled out some of the obstacles they face in serving sparsely populated or remote areas in the nation.

The panel convened by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota and

moderated by the head of the Federal Communications Commission highlighted the so-called "digital divide" created when high-speed Internet capabilities are not readily available to certain parts of the country.

"If we don't do this right, we will have a nation of haves and have-nots," said Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D.

FCC Chairman Bill Kennard urged the chief executives assembled to "get beyond the rhetoric of blaming the Congress, the FCC or each other" and focus on ways to tackle the problem.

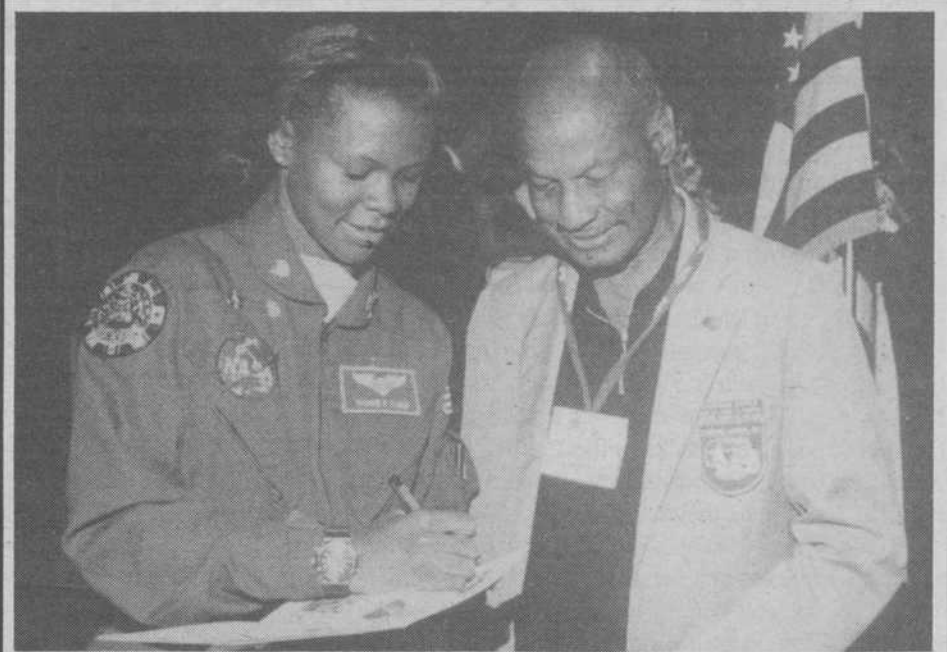
But industry heads raised

both regulation and economic incentives as hurdles they sometimes face in bringing their advanced services to areas with low volumes of customers and large distances to cross.

US West chief Sol Trujillo said current regulatory policy has encouraged business decisions that focus on investing in bigger cities and serving large-business customers.

"If outdated regulatory barriers were removed, we could do more and would do more," Trujillo said.

"Public policy does effect (See Digital, Page 4)



Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

UP, UP AND AWAY

Astronaut Yvonne Darlene Cagle signs an autograph for a member of the Tuskegee airmen during a recent conference co-produced by the Tuskegee Airmen and the Organization of Black Airline Pilots at the Riviera Hotel.

Minority organizations unite to launch television boycott

NEW YORK (AP) — A coalition of minority organizations is calling for a boycott of the four major networks during the first two weeks of the TV season to protest "the continued invisibility of Latinos on television."

The "brownout" of ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC begins Sunday and continues through Sept. 25.

The National Council of La Raza, which is coordinating the boycott, counts just one Hispanic — Martin Sheen, on NBC's "The West Wing" — among the lead characters in the 38 new series premiering this fall.

At a news conference today, the group said it had teamed with other minority groups in a push to force the

entertainment industry to address the issue. They formed a negotiating team made up of former California congressmen Norman Minetta and Esteban Torres, NAACP president Kweisi Mfume, and the founder of American Indians in Film, Sonny Skyhawk.

Torres said at a news conference that the team hopes to get "a long-lasting, verifiable agreement that will create a rapid inclusion of minorities in programming as well as ownership."

John White, an NAACP spokesman, said only 52 of the 854 staff writers on major network shows are black. "The public interest is not served well by a monolithic,

all-white presentation of the world," he said.

While Hispanics constitute 11 percent of the U.S. population, they make up less than 2 percent of all characters on prime-time shows, according to Lisa Navarrete, a spokeswoman for La Raza.

In addition to Sheen, the group counts three Hispanics continuing on returning series: Bruno Campos (NBC's "Jesse"), and, on CBS, Hector Elizondo ("Chicago Hope") and Cheech Marin ("Nash Bridges").

The results of the boycott will not be measured by ratings, she said. "If we can educate a large proportion of

the community and others who are interested in this issue, then we've succeeded," Navarrete said.

Responding to the planned boycott, CBS said in a statement that it "remains committed to the idea that our programming, and indeed our organization, should reflect the diversity of our society. We agree that much progress in our industry remains to be made."

Said ABC: "We are making improvements and understand that we need to do more. This is an ongoing process and ABC is deeply committed to it."

Fox declined to comment on the boycott, and NBC had no immediate comment.

Some networks have already made cast changes for upcoming shows, though executives insisted they were in the works even before the outcry.

In their original form, none of the 27 new comedies and dramas set to premiere on the top four networks had minorities in a leading role, and few had them in supporting roles.

But more than a dozen minority characters have been added to new and returning series, including a Hispanic woman in ABC's sitcom "Sabrina."

"We certainly welcome the addition of characters," Navarrete said, "but there's a bigger problem."

Schools to begin 'student profiling'

WALLINGFORD, Conn. (AP) — Much like the FBI developing psychological profiles to track terrorists and serial killers, school psychologists are putting together checklists of characteristics common among students prone to violence.

With the pain of the deadly shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., still fresh, Wallingford Superintendent of Schools Joseph Cirsuolo said he would be remiss not to adopt "student profiling" in his district of 7,000 pupils.

"Our purpose in doing that is to intervene well before they ever decide to go out and buy a gun and do some damage," he said.

The profile of a potentially violent student will be given to staff throughout the district's 12 schools. If someone fits the description, the student's parents will be notified, Cirsuolo said.

"We intervene early if we think a youngster has reading problems. We intervene early if we think a youngster has adjustment problems and matters of that type," he said. "So why shouldn't we intervene early if we think a youngster may be prone to violence?"

There are similar efforts across the country. In Granite City, Ill., school administrators are measuring students against a behavior checklist that includes abusive language, cruelty to animals and writings reflecting an interest in "the dark side of life."

Students who fit the profile can undergo counseling, be transferred to an alternative education program or even be expelled.

Critics call "student profiling" an overreaction to the rash of school shootings, including the Columbine attack in which 15 people died. They fear that children who do not reflect an image of the perfect student could be unfairly labeled.

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