

Task force to study wireless for all

Steve Geissinger

SACRAMENTO -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has appointed 21 technology leaders -- a third from the Bay Area -- to a Broadband Task Force that will join forces with another new agency to engineer plans to remove barriers to high-speed cable and wireless access.

At least \$460 million soon will be available for Schwarzenegger and legislators to implement proposals to bridge the "digital divide" -- the lack of broadband data transmission to rural and poor urban areas. The governor said a key step will be slashing bureaucratic red tape.

"California is home to the greatest technology entrepreneurs," Schwarzenegger said. "Let's show the world what we can do." The governor's creation of the task force, promised in last year's State of the State address, comes as the state Public Utilities Commission is starting up its new California Emerging Technology Fund, PUC spokeswoman Susan Carothers said.

As part of the merger between SBC-AT&T and Verizon/MCI, the PUC required the companies to place \$60million into the Emerging Technology Fund over five years, Carothers said.

About \$400 million will be available from the education bond that voters approved last month. The money will be earmarked for development of telemedicine, which allows doctors to use high-speed data transmission to examine patients hundreds of miles away.

With money available from those sources and likely others, the governor ordered the Broadband Task Force to recommend ways to expand the high-speed data transmission network with a preliminary report in 90 days, followed by a comprehensive study within a year.

The governor says the widely varied benefits range from improving education and boosting high-tech jobs to lowering consumer access costs and allowing more state agency videoconferencing that saves taxpayers money.

Sunne Wright McPeak, a former Schwarzenegger Cabinet secretary from Pleasanton, has been hired as executive director of the PUC's Emerging Technology Fund and was appointed to the Broadband Task Force.

"We certainly think that there can be lots of cooperation, not only with the Broadband Task Force and the state, but with the private sector and not-for-profit organizations," McPeak said. "We have to find how to get the most impact."

The Broadband Task Force includes other prominent figures from the public and private sectors.

From the Bay Area, members include Rachele Chong, 47, of San Francisco, a PUC commissioner; Ellis Berns, 57, of San Mateo, economic development manager for Mountain View; Charles Giancarlo, 48, of Atherton, senior vice president of Cisco Systems; and William Huber, 40, of San Ramon, a former senior vice president of network services for AT&T.

Others include Milo Medin, 43, of Menlo Park, chairman of M2Z Networks; Bryan Martin, 39, of Santa Clara, director of 8X8 Incorporated; and Emy Tseng, 41, of San Francisco, director of TechConnect for the city of San Francisco.

As part of the executive order creating the task force, the governor called for streamlined, expedited right-of-way permitting procedures to accelerate broadband deployment and creation of a uniform pricing policy for private companies paying for "right-of-way" access to state roads.

He also ordered the General Services Department to contract for wireless broadband service atop select state buildings.

The efforts will be good for the economy, Schwarzenegger said.

The California Communications Association estimates that every dollar invested in broadband networks generates \$3 in economic activity and that every \$1 billion in telecom capital spending equates to 7,000 new jobs.

The federal government and other states have formed similar task forces with varying results.

California's Broadband Task Force has yet to meet and select co- chairs. Members receive no salary and are not subject to Senate confirmation.

Contact Steve Geissinger at sgeissinger@angnewspapers.com or (916) 447-9302.

©2006 ANG Newspapers. Cannot be used or repurposed without prior written permission.

Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning Company. All rights Reserved.