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Hawaii Broadband Taskforce Examines the Future of High-Speed Internet Access

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HONOLULU, HI – The Hawaii Broadband Task Force has begun work to examine the current state and future potential of high-speed Internet access in the state, and the impact broadband networks and advanced communications technologies could have on such areas as economic diversification, health care, public safety, and education.

David Lassner of the University of Hawaii, who chairs the task force, emphasized the impact the availability of broadband service can have on the state and its residents. "Increasing the speed and availability of broadband service could affect the entire community," he said. "Clearly, it is a vital part of our economic, social, and educational infrastructure, but it can also make additional health care services available to our seniors and rural residents, for example. It is no exaggeration to call it the transformative technology of our generation."

While the adoption of broadband technology has increased steadily, the speed and affordability of broadband in the U.S., including Hawaii, has not kept pace with other developed countries worldwide. "Among the top economies worldwide in 2005, the U.S. ranked sixteenth in broadband penetration," said Representative Kyle Yamashita, who introduced the House Bill that established the task force, and now serves as a member. "In Hawaii today, the fastest broadband connections available are between 11 and 15 megabits per second. When you look at the country as a whole, that's great service. But when you compare it to Japan, where one hundred megabits per second is routine, it's not as impressive. And when you consider cost on a per megabit basis, customers in Japan pay far less than customers here."

"Why is that," asked task force member Sen. Carol Fukunaga, "and what do we have to do to bring ourselves to those levels? Technology is the key to success in today's economy, so we have to ask how can we make that technology more available in Hawaii."

The task force includes representatives of private sector technology, telecommunications, and investment industries; federal, state, and county government entities; and the Hawaii Legislature. It is being assisted by the Office of the Auditor, which will provide research and organizational support services.

Serving on the task force are its Vice Chair Nam Vu (ShakaNet, Inc.), Gary Caulfield (First Hawaiian Bank), Joel Matsunaga (Hawaiian TelCom), Henk Rogers (BluePlanet Wireless), Nate Smith (Oceanic Time Warner Cable), Gordon Bruce (City and County of Honolulu), Clyde Sonobe (Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs), Jennifer Goto Sabas (Office of Sen. Daniel K. Inouye), Sen. Will Espero, Sen. David Ige, Rep. Marcus Oshiro, and Rep. Gene Ward. The task force will prepare a preliminary report for submission to the 2008 Legislature, and a final report for the 2009 Legislature.

More information on the Task Force and its work is available at <http://www.hbtf.org>

Richard Rapoza is the director of communications for the Senate Majority Party (Democrat) in the Hawaii State Senate.

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