



AT&T/T-Mobile merger is good for rural Kentucky

By Jim Waters

Whitesburg's Mimi Pickering is a sincere, but misguided, local filmmaker.

"The unregulated, market-driven approach to providing broadband has not worked for us," [Pickering wrote](#) in a Lexington Herald-Leader article.

Her "plot" centers around this: competition, innovation and investment by private telecommunications firms are responsible for keeping rural America from accessing high-speed broadband service needed to conduct business globally and get an education online.

Instead, in Pickering's script, government regulation, coercion and public spending will accomplish what the marketplace has failed to do.

A real possibility is a new fictional movie from her that makes AT&T and T-Mobile, who recently announced plans to merge, the villains.

But who would be the heroes – the Federal Communications Commission, who could slow the merger process down and halt it altogether?

I suggest Pickering considering creating a documentary. Documentaries, to achieve credibility, must offer a search for truth instead of fictional fantasy.

Such a documentary would reveal:

- The merger of powerhouses AT&T and T-Mobile will strengthen, not weaken, competition in the wireless market world.

Without this merger, T-Mobile would continue to lose ground – and customers – due to its "much smaller coverage area and less robust phone lineup," notes Steven Titch of the Reason Foundation.

But combining with AT&T will allow the company to be "of far more benefit to consumers than they would as separate entities," Titch writes. Its customers will have better and faster coverage on the Internet service in their homes and businesses.

Randolph May, president of the Free State Foundation, wonders just how much concern there should be about a monopoly when it is competitors – *competitors* – who "mount vigorous campaigns designed to convince the antitrust authorities and the regulators that if the merger is approved there will be an [absence of competition.](#)"

May also notes that anti-competitive claims run counter to declining prices in recent years, "indicating a substantially competitive market."

- How the merger benefits poor Kentuckians in rural Appalachia – those Pickering claims are harmed by a "market-driven approach."

President Obama set a national goal of 98 percent of all Americans having access to broadband within five years.

That will be quite a challenge – just in Kentucky, where, according to an analysis of federal data by The Daily Yonder, only 29 percent of the [65,135 farms](#) have access to high-speed broadband Internet service.

Frank Povah, a farmer in Stamping Ground, could narrate Pickering’s documentary.

When he moved from Australia to Stamping Ground – only a 20-minute drive from the state capitol – Povah said he expected more than the “just a little better than dial-up” speed he’s getting.

An AT&T/T-Mobile merger will result in broadband access coming to 97 percent of all Americans with “4G” service that “will arrive at data speeds rivaling the fastest wired connections today,” said former Virginia Democratic congressman Rick Boucher, honorary chairman of the Internet Innovation Alliance, who has made bringing technology to underserved rural areas his primary cause.

Perhaps Pickering could interview some students in failing schools in rural Kentucky. They could testify about how not having broadband access could keep them from benefiting from online classes and getting the education they need.

- The government’s role is to ensure a fair and level playing field, not to manage the development of the communications marketplace.

In the past, the FCC has used various tactics to slow down the approval process for mergers – even when they make as much sense as the proposed AT&T/T-Mobile one does.

Kentucky’s congressional delegation should do everything in its power to move the anti-competitive FCC agency out of the way and get this merger approved – with 4G speed.

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