

RURAL BROADBAND INSIGHTS FOR CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



WITH PARTNER JONATHAN CHAMBERS

Co-ops Connect FYI

By Jonathan Chambers • May 26, 2023

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Privilege



A friend told me this story recently. She was traveling on the Washington Metro. A man and two children boarded her car, which was about half full. The man took a seat, slumped, and looked at the floor. The two children began running up and down the Metro car. They grabbed at each other, at people, knocked into one elderly man, tore a woman's newspaper. All the folks in the car looked at the man to do something, to

police the children. And as the children caused havoc, folks became more and more annoyed.

Finally, a woman spoke directly to the man. “Aren’t you going to do something about your kids?”

He answered, “They’re not my kids.” Then he added, “They’re my sister’s children. We’ve come from the hospital. My sister was in an accident, and she just died. I don’t know how to tell her children.”

With that, my friend said, it was as if the air in the car changed. From hostility to sympathy, from angry glances to offers of support. One woman calmed the children. Another spoke quietly to the man, offering words of condolence. When the car stopped and the man and children got out, everyone’s hearts went with them.

This is a simple story of understanding. Understanding that none of us truly know what is going on in other people’s lives. And maybe, occasionally, we should remember that grace should be our first reaction.



The Frying Pan River near my Colorado home

I have received so much support these past few months, and I wish to acknowledge the privilege of being surrounded by so many friends and colleagues, including so many from the co-op community.

As I have said so often recently, this wasn't my plan, but I can't know His plan.

My life's work has now become a salve. At a recent electric co-op annual meeting, a woman approached me after I spoke about our broadband project. She told me of her heart condition, and how she lives in an area with no cell signal and where the copper network is so degraded and of such poor quality that she can't make a phone call when it rains. She expects that one day she will have to make a 911 call, and it worries her.

"There are no words I can say that will help ease your grief about losing your wife," she told me. "But I hope you can find some comfort knowing that you will save my life." Her words have been a great comfort.

I know that I was born into privilege, given many advantages. Wealth, a quick mind, college and graduate school education, international travel, rewarding work, occasional power, a loving marriage, two wonderful boys.

We all suffer loss. As a friend of mine says, "You can be in the river or out of the river." I choose to be in the river. I choose to remember how privileged I have been.

What Do We Do With Our Privilege?



The covenant of America (the American dream) has bypassed too many, overlooked too many, allowed too many to come up short. Especially in rural America. The electrification of rural America took a certain vision, boldness, and grit. Today's policymakers lack those attributes.

The electric co-ops we work with have been given a trust, handed down from generation to generation. For co-op boards and managers, that trust is both a responsibility and a privilege.

We, the co-op community, have a chance to use our privilege to help rural America once again.

At Conexon, we believe it is feasible and necessary to build a fiber line everywhere a co-op has built an electric line. We believe in local community ownership of infrastructure, and we are willing to put our money where we work, to invest alongside co-ops or invest in place of co-ops, to ensure connectivity to all of rural America.

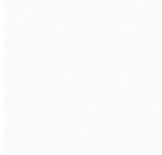
It is our privilege to do so.

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