Obama Seeks Additional Funding for Digital Education Training, Spectrum Auctions

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

By Bryce Baschuk

March 4 — President Barack Obama's fiscal year 2015 budget proposes an additional $200 million to help train educators as a part of the administration's ConnectED digital connectivity program.

The funding would support the government's E-Rate initiative to provide a total of 100,000 teachers in 500 school districts across the nation access to professional development, according to budget documents released March 4. “To ensure students receive the full benefit of this connectivity, the budget invests in training for teachers in hundreds of school districts across the country,” a summary said.

Obama's ConnectED proposal seeks to provide schools and libraries with broadband Internet connections of at least 100 megabits per second with a target of a gigabit per second within five years. He previously said expanding high speed connectivity to schools is only part of the equation and that teachers should receive training so that they can understand and use the tools that enable digital learning.

FCC Spectrum Auction Support

The administration sought to allocate $375.4 million for the Federal Communications Commission, a 10 percent funding increase from the agency's current budget of $339.8 million. The budget would provide the FCC with $20 million to modernize the Universal Service Fund program, upgrade the FCC's technology platforms and support its upcoming spectrum auctions.

The FCC is currently crafting the rules for the congressionally mandated broadcast spectrum incentive auction of the 600 megahertz (MHz) band. The rules will govern a reverse auction that will enable TV broadcasters to voluntarily release their spectrum in return for a portion of the proceeds from a subsequent forward auction of the relinquished spectrum. The remaining revenue generated from the forward auction of the spectrum to wireless carriers will fund the $7 billion development of FirstNet, a nationwide interoperable communications network for first responders, and help pay down the nation's debt.

The White House budget said the FCC's forthcoming spectrum auctions will reduce the nation's deficit by nearly $20 billion over the next 10 years. The budget also proposes the enactment of spectrum license user fees as a means to promote more efficient allocation of spectrum to high priority uses.

NTIA, USDA Broadband Programs

The budget proposed $51 million in funding for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), an 11 percent increase from the $46 million NTIA received in 2014. The budget would also provide $7.5 million for the NTIA's Internet Policy Center, which seeks to enhance the agency's coordination and policy-making with broadband stakeholders, a summary said.

The White House budget also proposed to double the Department of Agriculture's current funding levels for broadband deployment programs to rural communities. The budget allocations would target 16 of the “neediest, most rural communities, which are least likely to have access to high-speed broadband infrastructure,” it said.

To contact the reporter on this story: Bryce Baschuk in Washington at bbaschuk@bna.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Heather Rothman at hrothman@bna.com

To view additional stories from Telecommunications Law Resource Center™ register for a free trial now

- Related News
- Comcast Extends Adoption Program For Broadband Amid Merger Scrutiny
- After Missteps and Delays, the Cable Industry Is Once Again Remaking Its Wireless Future
- DHS Secretary Hails Cybersecurity Legislation as ‘Good Step Forward’
- FCC Commissioner Defends Controversial Media Study on Barriers to Small Businesses
- House Republicans Consider STELA Changes, Nixing Firms CableCARD Requirements