

## **Press Release - August 10, 2008**

Communities Connecting of Columbia County, Inc., received word last month that the half-million dollar grant promised by the Office of Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand (D-20<sup>th</sup>) for broadband development in Columbia County was not to be forthcoming.

A spokesperson for the Congresswoman explained that “it was *“soft money”*, and that *“no appropriations were ever “promised” or “granted” in FY08. The earmark was a soft earmark with no funds or guarantee of funds attached.”*

By contrast, the language used by the Congresswoman’s office when the appropriations were first announced was very different indeed. We find it shocking that *no money whatsoever* was accorded this vital social and economic cause, despite the fact that the earmark was slated to be drawn on the Department of Agriculture’s budget, and the Congresswoman herself sits on the Agriculture Committee.

“Soft funds” notwithstanding, the money was allocated, legally, in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill (the passage of which was accompanied by huge concessions to continue funding for the war in Iraq). The fact that the broadband funding was not pursued or subsequently secured can only be seen as gross negligence on the part of Congresswoman Gillibrand’s organization, and a loss of untold magnitude for Columbia County.

### **Double Jeopardy**

Unfortunately for Columbia County, the bad news does not end there. Prior to the notification of the loss of federal grant monies, Communities Connecting had determined possible eligibility for New York State funding under the auspices of the NYS Office for Technology, under the Governor’s Universal Broadband Initiative. Our organization applied for the State grant funding, and was subsequently notified that we were to be awarded almost \$200,000 to further our cause.

Regrettably, as Communities Connecting was making final contractual arrangements to secure this State funding, we were given the news concerning the loss of Federal funding. According to the terms to be agreed upon with the State, these funds were contingent upon matching Federal dollars. With the unforeseen loss of our primary funding, we could not legally fulfill the terms of the State grant contract. We were thus forced to *forfeit* our *awarded* State grant.

### **Take Action**

We strongly urge all Columbia County residents, especially those without any or adequate access to broadband Internet, to write your Congresswoman, directly, to express your extreme displeasure with this utterly unacceptable outcome.

### **CONTACT:**

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