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Editorial Board:
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THE RECORDER

The editorial below represents the opinion of the Editorial Board.
We invite other opinions for publication as Letters to the Editor or as My Turn columns.

Make the connection

Let's make 2008 the year of broadband Internet coverage in Massachusetts.

The fact that so many communities, including plenty in our portion of the state, are without high-speed Internet access is an outrage that demands not just attention but a solution.

As state Sen. Stanley Rosenberg said this week, "broadband access is as integral to this generation as the Interstate highway system was to the coming of age in the 1950s."

Going back even further, one can equate it to rural electrification in the 1930s.

It's all about seeing that people who live in rural areas are not left behind. Those who supported rural electrification understood that providing regions with affordable electricity would have a significant and positive impact on people's lives, through economic development and a better standard of living.

As was the case in the 1930s, one of the hurdles that had to be surmounted was the argument that it was too expensive to string the lines that would provide power in areas with sparse population.

Thankfully, though, there were others who found this situation unacceptable. The administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized that government's role included finding ways to get past such hurdles. To bring electricity to rural areas, the Rural Electric

Administration was created.

If it weren't for FDR's decision to step into the impasse, we shudder to think how long it would have been before the utilities finally got around to providing service in areas they had long ignored.

■ The issue:

The lack of high-speed Internet access in many rural Mass. communities.

■ Our opinion:

This continues to be an unacceptable situation and one that demands the government step in to remedy the problem.

Some 80 years later, there's a real need for government to intercede on behalf of rural residents again.

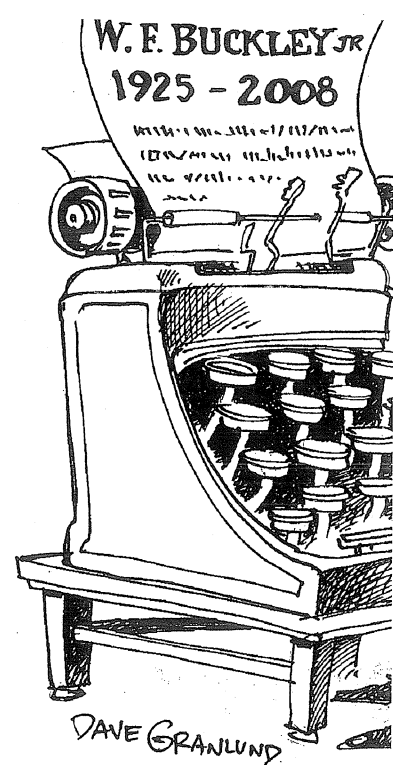
That has to be the message that is delivered strong and clear at an upcoming conference on providing broadband Internet service to western Mass. (The conference was scheduled for today, but postponed due to weather.)

Thankfully, it is a message that a number of our local legislators understand.

And having the government step in is something that Gov. Deval Patrick sees as an integral part of the solution. That's why he wants to put \$25 million toward creating a public-private partnership that would deliver high-speed Internet to those communities who don't have access or are woefully underserved.

The whole process will continue to move along if more people are convinced that this must happen ... and soon. Legislators whose communities don't have this problem must be made to see the wisdom of what Patrick is proposing with taxpayers' money.

Lawmakers and officials on the federal level must recognize that they, too, can play a role in alleviating the situation as it now stands.



The last t William F. Buc

By JACOB HEILBRUNN

By common consent, William F. Buckley Jr., who died Wednesday, was the father of modern conservatism.

But he also ended up as one of the Bush administration's most trenchant critics. His death not only represents the loss of one of America's leading intellectual figures but also underscores the extent of the collapse of the conservative movement that has shaped politics so decisively for decades.

Like no other personality, Buckley pulled together the disparate strands of the conservative movement to endow it with panache, self-confidence and a sense of being on the cutting edge. An avid sailor, a writer of numerous spy novels and the host of the first of the political talk shows, "Firing Line," Buckley quickly became a celebrity who made conservatism respectable.

This was no small feat in postwar America. After the defeat of Nazi Germany and the widespread acceptance of the New Deal, conservatism looked like a relic, consisting of a bunch of isolationists and anti-Semitic cranks. The journalist Murray Kempton, who later became a close friend of Buckley's, summed up the dominant liberal thinking at the time when he observed, "The New American Right is most conspicuous