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Dept. of Education Walks Back Heritage Wireless Partnership, Avoids Questions About Process and Procedure

Education backtracks on Heritage Wireless partnership, leaving questions about its origins. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, previously thanked by D.O.E. for her key role in the partnership, remains silent on the issue.

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Janeke Simon **February 01, 2024**

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A new press release from the V.I. Department of Education purports to clarify the announcement made [last Saturday](#), but instead raises new questions based on contradictions between the two statements.

“The VIDE does not endorse any specific company over another, nor has it entered into an agreement with any service provider,” Thursday’s press release states. Last Saturday, however, VIDE told the public that free tablets and internet services for qualifying students were made available “through a partnership with Heritage Wireless and the dedicated efforts of Senator Donna Frett-Gregory.”

In Saturday’s announcement, readers were only informed of one supplier through which the devices and internet services could be accessed - Heritage Wireless. Now, after lawmakers and Consortium journalists questioned why a government department came to be promoting and marketing the services of a company seemingly owned by a man with an [extensive criminal history](#), VIDE admits in the new press release that “families can take advantage of the resources offered by multiple service providers by participating in this program.”

The department has also belatedly informed the public that the Affordable Connectivity Program “will stop accepting new applications and enrollments on Wednesday, February 7, 2024” – information that was completely missing from the initial announcement. A custom-built Microsoft Office form managed by an unknown entity included in Saturday’s press release has since been taken down and revised, and the new announcement contains a different link altogether, directing users to the Universal Service Administrative Company, the official administrator of the Universal Service Fund (USF), overseen by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

In stark contrast with Saturday’s announcement, in which the Dept. of Education expressed “sincere appreciation to Senator Donna Frett-Gregory for her invaluable support and for her role in establishing the connection with Heritage Wireless,” Thursday’s announcement makes no mention of either the lawmaker or the approximately year-old company. Questions about exactly how and why the relationship between the three entities — announced by the department — came to pass, remain unanswered.

Requests for comment from Education, Senator Frett-Gregoy, and Corey Alston, head of Heritage Wireless have not been responded to as of press time.