



SEEING BEYOND

Investing in State Leadership: Improving Communities



January 21, 2010

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

As the leaders of each of the four undersigned national associations of Black state and local elected officials, in collaboration with the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators and the National Foundation for Women Legislators, we write to encourage your administration to follow two core principles:

- make universal adoption the nation's top broadband policy priority, with net regulation a secondary priority calibrated to the needs of the underserved; and
- ensure that any regulations that might widen the digital divide are not approved.

Upon taking your oath of office last year, you designated universal broadband adoption and use among our highest national priorities, and like you we deem this technology an invaluable resource and essential platform for social advancement and economic opportunity. We applaud your enthusiasm about this issue and are looking to engage local, state and federal solutions to the broadband adoption challenges we face as a nation.

In a digital economy, access to broadband spells the difference between first and second-class citizenship. Only by being online can Americans enjoy full access to the job market, health care, education and civic engagement.

Unfortunately, broadband is not equally available to all sectors of society. The 2009 Pew study of broadband usage in the home revealed that while 63% of all adult Americans have adopted broadband at home, only 46% of African Americans, 40% of Hispanic Americans and 35% of households earning less than \$20,000 do. It has been estimated that only 5-8% of Native Americans on tribal lands enjoy broadband in their homes.

Now, more than ever, federal, state and local governments need to take proactive steps to redress these inequalities. We are hopeful that the FCC's National Broadband Plan will adopt mechanisms to enable underserved communities to become more digitally connected.

Like you, we are enthusiastic supporters of maintaining the open Internet that has provided us so many benefits to date. We have also endorsed regulations that would prohibit discrimination against legal content and ensure full transparency. Nonetheless, we are concerned that the net regulations currently being contemplated by the FCC lend themselves to the creation of unmanaged networks that would increase consumer costs, hinder new job creation, diminish service quality and reduce broadband adoption and use, particularly among the underserved.

To further our mutual goals of creating greater opportunities for universal broadband access, adoption and use, we ask that you reach out to the Federal Communications Commission and reinforce the importance of rendering a National Broadband Plan that adequately addresses the issue of closing the digital divide. We would also ask that you communicate the same message to all of your federal agencies but particularly the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and USDA's Rural Utility Service, as they bare the responsibility of administering the federal government's broadband stimulus program. We stand ready to continue our task of championing broadband opportunity and digital empowerment among our constituents and through our various policy-making vehicles and we look forward to the opportunity to work with you in framing effective broadband solutions at the local, state and federal levels.

Sincerely,



Calvin Smyre
Georgia House of Representatives
President, National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL)



Sharon Weston Broome
Louisiana State Senate
President, National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (NOBEL) Women



Robert Steele
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Mayor George L. Grace
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