

**TOWARD ACCESS, ADOPTION AND INCLUSION:  
A CALL FOR DIGITAL EQUALITY AND BROADBAND OPPORTUNITY**

A Joint Statement from

The National Black Caucus of State Legislators  
The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators  
The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators  
The National Asian Pacific American Caucus of State Legislators

In Conjunction with

The Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies  
The Hispanic Institute

## **TOWARD ACCESS, ADOPTION AND INCLUSION: A CALL FOR DIGITAL EQUALITY AND BROADBAND OPPORTUNITY**

Toward Access, Adoption and Inclusion: A Call for Digital Equality and Broadband Opportunity is a policy statement with research support from The Joint Center of Political and Economic Studies and the Hispanic Institute, and authored on behalf of the following national organizations representing minority legislators across the country:

- The National Black Caucus of State Legislators
- The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
- The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators
- The National Asian Pacific American Caucus of State Legislators

### **The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies**

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is the only freestanding think tank focusing primarily on the concerns of African Americans and communities of color. Currently, Joint Center Initiatives include:

- The Media and Technology Institute
- The Health Policy Institute
- The Commission to Engage African Americans on Climate Change
- The Civic Engagement and Governance Institute

### **The Hispanic Institute**

The Hispanic Institute is a 501 (c) 3 designated nonprofit organization. The Hispanic Institute's mission is sharply focused: THI provides an effective education forum for an informed and empowered Hispanic America. The Hispanic Institute manages several ongoing projects:

- Study of Hispanic economic contributions
- Media monitoring
- Consumer fraud protection
- Citizenship education
- Technology and Telecommunication research

The Hispanic Institute provides an effective education forum for an informed and empowered Hispanic America.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Asian Pacific American Caucus of State Legislators, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, National Caucus of Native American State Legislators and National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators issue this joint policy statement in recognition of the important role that broadband plays in all our lives. We firmly believe that ubiquitous broadband access, adoption and use stand to be great equalizers in our society. As such, we must ensure that Internet adoption and use via a broadband connection becomes engrained as a social, economic and cultural norm in our communities. We believe this will amplify our ability to eliminate poverty, increase educational opportunities, render quality healthcare more accessible and affordable, and yield new avenues for the provision of better public safety and provide tools that lead to a cleaner environment. For our organizations, and most significantly for the communities and people we represent, the current broadband status quo is unacceptable.

While our constituents all have unique needs, we recognize that absent digital equality and broadband opportunities, our communities – particularly those populated by low-income, non-English speaking, rural, tribal or otherwise underserved populations – will be unable to fully engage in the increasingly global, innovation economy. Because universal broadband access and adoption are paramount to the success of our communities and this country, this report, sets forth our top-tier, joint policy recommendations as prospective aids to federal lawmakers, regulatory bodies, and state and local elected officials, as we all endeavor to create and implement new opportunities for increased broadband adoption and digital inclusion.

In the pages that follow, we set forth principles of progress we believe will better enable us to:

- Identify the presence and ramifications of the digital divide within African American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities;
- Ensure that broadband connectivity is available, accessible and affordable for every American, regardless of geographic or socio-economic situation;
- Incent broadband adoption and use by increasing its cultural value and social worth; and
- Foster investment in, and robust use of, high-speed broadband Internet services to increase job creation and economic opportunity.

We recognize the power of broadband, and we coalesce around our collective interests. For our communities and for our country, we must guarantee broadband access, adoption and inclusion to secure America's future.

## **BROADBAND IS THE NEW BEACON FOR EQUALITY & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

Although the disparities that plague this nation will not disappear overnight, we believe that the focused pursuit of ubiquitous broadband access, adoption and use will help minimize the inequities that have blighted America's legacy for too long. Thus we seek affordable broadband for all, not as an end in itself, but as a way to enrich individual lives and to enrich our country. We seek broadband for all because it creates opportunities, breaks down barriers and promotes equality by opening new doors in areas of jobs, education, politics, and health care. Broadband can help reduce the many remnants of segregation that have historically hampered communities of color, and provide those same communities with better opportunities to seek the American dream based on their individual merit, ambition, and talents. We, therefore, must work collectively to achieve digital equality for all Americans, particularly those who have been historically marginalized or disenfranchised.

***Broadband delivers economic opportunity and jobs.*** For individuals, broadband provides new employment opportunity through telework jobs that can be performed remotely, and it enables them to research prospective employment and connect to job opportunities posted online in any part of America. For entrepreneurs, connectivity enables them to reach customers, suppliers and partners from their offices or on the go; and for startups and small businesses, broadband puts them in touch with bankers and lenders to access the capital they need to launch their enterprises, to build and to grow. For communities, study after study has shown that connectivity means more and better jobs because more and more businesses set up shop only in locations from which they can reach the rest of the world.

***Broadband builds community through social connectivity.*** From worldwide social networks like Facebook, to electronic bulletin boards established by local community centers and churches, broadband connectivity can bind us more closely and facilitate local, national and international dialogue for problem solving. At every level, it helps us break through both individual and communal isolation that can lead to despair and inertia. Indeed, one recent study concluded that the connections enabled by broadband could reduce clinical depression, especially among the elderly.<sup>1</sup> With broadband, we can strengthen our communities and create greater social ties to our cultural roots.

***Broadband facilitates political empowerment.*** With broadband every citizen can make his or her voice heard – directly by e-mail and blog to the elected officials, regulators and decision makers at every level of government. Broadband is the ultimate organizing tool, enabling community leaders and campaign teams to exchange real-time information, coordinate movements, and implement strategic action. Broadband helps us level the political playing field, partly offsetting the power of money with the swift and nimble movement made possible by instant communication. It also makes it possible for us to bear witness to historic political events by enabling us to flash digital photos to the world when there is something the world

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<sup>1</sup> Ford, George S. and Sherry, G, *Internet Use and Depression Among the Elderly*, Phoenix Center Policy Paper Series (Oct. 15, 2009) available at <http://phoenix-center.org/DepressionOct152009.pdf> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

must see – like Wounded Knee, Selma, or Manzanar. Broadband is the ultimate democratizing tool.

***Broadband solves problems.*** From education to healthcare, broadband solves problems. Thanks to broadband, students from the poorest inner city neighborhoods, isolated rural communities, or remote tribal lands can access the finest libraries and top teachers. Stay-at-home moms and working parents alike can pursue career training and college degrees without living on campus. Senior citizens can continue to learn and access quality healthcare without leaving home. Healthcare providers can keep tabs on patients through remote monitoring, and also provide emergency diagnosis and consultation by viewing medical images and data relayed over the Internet from thousands of miles away.

At the national level, too, broadband can help us achieve pressing goals, including economic expansion, energy independence, environmental sustainability, public safety, and better healthcare. It can help close the gaps in education, economic prospects, and aspirations that threaten to leave too many in our communities permanently behind. With minority citizens soon to account for a majority of Americans, broadband's ubiquity and inclusive power can ensure that the nation embraces and lives the dream of first class citizenship for all.

Both in the near and long term, the leveraged use of broadband can help us promote greater socio-economic parity among the American citizenry. Full immersion in the broadband era, however, cannot and should not become the sole responsibility of any one province of government, nor should full responsibility for our broadband transition fall entirely on any single agency, company, political organization or public interest group. We must therefore work collectively, that we may wield broadband as a mighty tool of empowerment for *all* people. Together we can thrive. Together we move towards greater broadband access, adoption and inclusion.

## **FILLING THE GAPS: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

Right now, in America, we face a persistent digital divide between those with broadband connectivity and those without that threatens the future sustainability of our communities and our country as a whole.

For some, the dividing line is geographic. Most of America has the infrastructure for broadband service. But in remote, sparsely populated parts of the United States, broadband has yet to be deployed to rural or tribal lands, either because of lack of feasibility or lack of service demand. For others, the dividing line is economic. The wires are visible from their windows, but the cost of service and computing devices is just too high for their budgets. The digital world is close enough to touch and yet too far away to experience. For others, the dividing line revolves around the lack of digital know-how and technical skills required to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by broadband.

When we add it all up, the dividing line often falls along the lines of race, ethnicity, language and tribal status. As policymakers, our caucuses jointly seek to remove these barriers so that all of the people in our communities can enjoy the full benefits of a digital society.

The path towards greater digital inclusion must begin with a focused study of current trends in broadband access, adoption and use. To date, the limited evidence that exists for measuring broadband activity within minority populations tends to indicate that our communities, particularly those comprised of low-income, non-English speaking, rural or tribal members, under-represent in areas of broadband adoption and use.

For some, service is simply unavailable. For others the value of such technology is not clear, or they lack sufficient digital literacy training and therefore it is not adopted or used. For still others, the costs of access – computing and other software devices, and monthly high-speed Internet service charges – render broadband usage too expensive.

There are a host of reasons why minority communities, on average, tend not to adopt and use broadband technologies to the same extent as their non-minority counterparts. The reality, however, is that we do not know nearly enough about many of these barriers to adoption. Thus the first step in creating new digital equality and broadband opportunities is to learn more about the problems of adoption we now face. The more we understand about the digital divide, the better equipped we will be to create greater opportunities for digital inclusion in our communities, and American society at large.

Though adoption trends vary widely across ethnic and racial lines, English proficiency, geographic location and income seem to play major roles in determining whether a person will adopt and use broadband. As noted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, broadband adoption among African Americans has stagnated in the past two years, and the digital divide between Blacks and Whites has grown larger, not smaller.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, only 46% of African Americans reported a home broadband connection, compared to 65% of Whites.<sup>3</sup> The year before, 43% of African Americans had broadband at home, as did 57% of Whites; and in 2007, 40% of African Americans had broadband access in the home, in contrast to 48% of their White counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

Granted, with broadband available in approximately 95% of the country, part of what these figures demonstrate is that only about two-thirds of the majority population *with access* to broadband actually uses it.<sup>5</sup> Therefore access alone is not dispositive of broadband adoption and use. The more telling point, however, is that in the three years it took for White Americans

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<sup>2</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption 2009*, Pew Internet & American Life Project (June 17, 2009) available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/10-Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.aspx> (last visited Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Communications Commission, *September Commission Meeting* (Sept. 29, 2009) available at [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DOC-293742A1.pdf](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-293742A1.pdf) (last viewed Nov. 10, 2009).

to increase broadband adoption by seventeen percentage points, African American adoption only increased by six percentage points.<sup>6</sup> Even if access by itself does not imply adoption or use, we can assume that those who do not adopt the broadband technologies available to them will be further disadvantaged by their inability to reap the benefits of using these transformative technologies.

Data for broadband adoption among other ethnic groups is even more confounding. For example, Pew recently conducted a survey to ascertain broadband adoption in Latino communities. Although the data is incomplete, it suggests a secondary digital divide within the Latino community that falls along linguistic lines. Notably, according to Pew, English-speaking Latinos subscribe to broadband service at a higher rate than White Americans, with 68% of those surveyed having broadband access at home.<sup>7</sup> Among Latinos whose main language is Spanish, however, broadband connectivity trails adoption rates for African Americans and White Americans. Just 32% of Spanish-speaking Latinos used the Internet in any form in 2006, compared to 78% who were English-dominant and 76% who were bilingual.<sup>8</sup> A study by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute showed a similar 55-20% split between English-dominant and Spanish-dominant Latinos in 2005.<sup>9</sup>

The broadband adoption rates for Native Americans and certain Asian American populations appear grimmer still. Hard data is not available, but the National Congress of American Indians estimates that just 5-8% of Native Americans living on tribal lands are enjoying broadband service in their homes.<sup>10</sup> And according to the California Emerging Technology Fund, broadband adoption and access among the Hmong and Filipino populations are much lower than in any other segment of Asian American society.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, anecdotal evidence suggests that Asian-Pacific immigrants from countries that are less advanced technologically, or who subsist on lower incomes, may not adopt broadband in substantial numbers.

In addition to the impact that ethnicity or socio-cultural understandings may have on broadband adoption, members of minority communities who live in rural America or belong to lower-income households are even less likely to adopt and use broadband. As of spring 2009, fewer than half of all rural Americans (46%) used broadband at home, compared to the 67% of urban and suburban households that had adopted the service.<sup>12</sup> The gap has changed little

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<sup>6</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption*, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Fox, Susannah and Livingston, Gretchen, *Latinos Online*, Pew Internet & American Life Project (Mar. 14, 2007) available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Latinos-Online.aspx> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Macias, Elsa E. and Temkin, Einat, *Trends and Impact of Broadband in the Latino Community*, Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (Oct. 2005) available at <http://www.trpi.org/PDFs/broadband.pdf> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> National Congress of American Indians, *National Broadband Plan Priorities and Universal Service Fund Tribal Broadband Program Needs*, Resolution PSP-09-084c (Sept. 22, 2009) available at [http://ncai.org/fileadmin/resolutions/PSP-09-084c\\_final.pdf](http://ncai.org/fileadmin/resolutions/PSP-09-084c_final.pdf) (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd, Mark, *Understanding Broadband Needs in a Diverse America*, Blogband.Gov (Nov. 5, 2009) available at <http://blog.broadband.gov/blog/index.jsp?authorId=14654> (last viewed Thursday, Nov. 19, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Capps, Michael J., *Bringing Broadband to Rural America*, Federal Communications Commission (May 22, 2009) available at [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DOC-291012A1.pdf](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-291012A1.pdf) (last viewed Nov. 19, 2009).

over time as adoption rates have climbed at about the same pace in both rural and urban communities in recent years.

Moreover, the digital divide is greatly impacted by income and economic achievement. Just 35% of Americans with annual incomes of less than \$20,000 a year reported home broadband service in spring 2009. In contrast, 80% of Americans with incomes of \$50,000-75,000 a year had home broadband, as did 88% of those earning more than \$100,000 annually.

Minority populations, particularly non-English speakers living on rural or tribal lands and making less than \$50,000 a year, are at great risk of being left further behind as the rest of our nation transitions towards an increasingly broadband-based digital economy. Therefore, the task of ascertaining the realities and rationale for broadband adoption among America's diverse citizenry is an essential predicate to our ability to create greater broadband opportunities. We therefore recommend that federal officials take these steps to promote universal broadband adoption:

1. Fund and conduct substantive, quantitative and qualitative research focused specifically on broadband connectivity, adoption and use among people of color, particularly those in unserved and underserved communities.
2. Develop analytical tool sets that enable us to better reflect America's diversity, i.e. using larger survey sample sizes, multi-language polls, an increase in face-to-face interviews, and other methods of capturing the essence of the broadband adoption patterns of America's growing minority populations.

#### **CONNECTIVITY: WHERE AVAILABILITY + AFFORDABILITY = ACCESSIBILITY**

If our goal is to achieve 100% broadband access and ubiquitous broadband adoption and use, then the most recent data suggests that much work remains. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which provides the most closely watched data about broadband adoption and use, almost two-thirds of Americans now enjoy wired broadband service in their homes.<sup>13</sup> That level of participation for a relatively new technology is impressive by historical standards, but is well short of our national goal of universal adoption. Perhaps most important, the data shows that the main reason we are falling short is unwillingness or inability of consumers to subscribe to broadband even when they have the opportunity.

It is not enough to make broadband available to a neighborhood. We also must make sure that broadband connections are affordable for the people who live there.

We do not dismiss the deployment challenge for communities, including much of America's rural and tribal lands. After all, a community cut off from broadband access can expect an unending downward spiral of economic decay. Right now, roughly 5% of Americans have no opportunity to enjoy wired broadband service. We simply *must* make broadband available

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<sup>13</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption*, 2009.



where these citizens live, and we recommend several policy actions to address these intolerable gaps in access to broadband technology.

But reaching the goal of affordable broadband for all requires an aggressive response to the adoption conundrum. More than one-third of all Americans who could enjoy broadband at home have decided not to subscribe.<sup>14</sup> Connecting these citizens to broadband is essential, and one of the keys is affordability. Even as we consider ways to advance deployment, we also must promote policies that enable affordable price offerings for consumers and oppose policies that could drive costs higher.

In addition to affordability, the solutions we seek must include a range of actions such as enhanced skills training for those unfamiliar with computers and other digital technology, and public-private partnerships such as those organized by One Economy's robust digital adoption programs and the Connected Nation initiative "No Child Left Offline," to deliver technology to the unserved. We should also encourage the expansion of the existing Lifeline and Link-Up programs that deliver broadband to those who cannot afford it on their own, and enhanced e-government services to demonstrate the value of broadband, culturally relevant content to encourage non-adopters to sign on for service, and community computer centers as an on-ramp to broadband for those who cannot afford it at home. Whatever the underlying program or policy may be, the goal is clear – we must achieve full connectivity for all Americans.

The mandate for a National Broadband Plan, coupled with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), rightly elevated broadband on the national agenda. ARRA sets aside \$7.2 billion to drive broadband deployment and adoption through the National Telecommunication and Information Administration's Broadband Technology Opportunity Program and to expand the role of broadband in rural America through the USDA's Rural Utilities Service Broadband Infrastructure Program.

The majority of ARRA funding is allocated towards broadband deployment. And while this action marks a substantial investment in broadband by the federal government, \$4.7 billion represents a fraction of the \$350 billion the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimates it will take to provide all Americans will equal access to high-speed broadband Internet services.<sup>15</sup> To date, the United States has relied on the private sector to make the investments in broadband infrastructure and to develop the major software applications that have driven our country's broadband growth over the years. Going forward, we need to ascertain whether government – at federal, state or local levels – is positioned to make the \$350 billion investment that is required to make broadband available to all Americans. We must also foster the type of investment that leads to the creation of new jobs and economic

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<sup>14</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption*, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Red Orbit, *FCC Plan to Extend Broadband Comes With Hefty Price Tag* (Sept. 30, 2009) available at [http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/1761755/fcc\\_plan\\_to\\_expand\\_broadband\\_comes\\_with\\_hefty\\_price\\_tag/index.html](http://www.redorbit.com/news/technology/1761755/fcc_plan_to_expand_broadband_comes_with_hefty_price_tag/index.html) (last visited Nov. 10, 2009).

opportunities in our communities by adopting policies that encourage broadband deployment and economic development.

If the majority of funding for broadband deployment will come from private investment, then the companion role for government participation is to dedicate far more resources toward increasing broadband adoption and use in areas where service is currently available. With only about 65% of Americans adopting broadband services where they are available, the greater issue beyond broadband deployment is broadband adoption.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the federal government can play a tremendous role in increasing productive use of available broadband services by funding and supporting broadband awareness campaigns, digital literacy and online training programs, and an increased use of online government services.

We understand the connectivity issue is a complex one that requires simultaneous action on multiple fronts. Likewise, we are aware that even beyond availability, affordability is a key determinant of broadband access, adoption and use, particularly as it pertains to members of minority, low-income and underserved populations.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that most consumers cite one of four fundamental reasons for not subscribing to broadband service – relevance, price, availability and usability in that order.<sup>17</sup> Half of all people surveyed cite reasons of relevance as the primary justification for not going online.<sup>18</sup> Others point to “usability” as a barrier because they lack the technical skills or comfort level to effectively use computer technology.<sup>19</sup>

While lack of relevance is a major factor, Pew found that price and availability are also prominent factors affecting the likelihood of broadband adoption among African Americans and English-speaking Latinos.<sup>20</sup> Even as the costs of broadband service and computer equipment decline, large numbers of minority citizens – who tend to earn less than their White counterparts – simply cannot afford to take advantage of the broadband services presently available to them.

An analysis of Pew data by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies concluded that “family income, when coupled with race and ethnicity continues to be a major barrier to broadband adoption.”<sup>21</sup> According to the Joint Center, of the African Americans who do not have Internet access, almost half (49%) had family incomes below \$20,000 annually. By comparison, 33% of Whites and 19% of English-speaking Latinos without broadband Internet

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<sup>16</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption*, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies in conjunction with the National Black Elected Officials, *Broadband Imperatives for African Americans: Policy Recommendations to Increase Digital Adoption for Minorities and their Communities* (Sept. 21, 2009) available at [www.broadbandimperatives.org](http://www.broadbandimperatives.org) (last visited Nov. 15, 2009).

report annual incomes of less than \$20,000.<sup>22</sup> When asked specifically *why* they do not have broadband at home, two-thirds of African Americans cited cost.<sup>23</sup> Of these, 53% said they would get broadband if the cost came down and 14% said they would like to have it if someone else paid for it.<sup>24</sup>

The price of broadband itself is not the only cost barrier to achieving affordable broadband solutions. Significant numbers of minority citizens do not own computers, in large part because of costs. Pew reports that African Americans were far less likely than White Americans to own a desktop computer.<sup>25</sup> About half of all African Americans surveyed owned a desktop computer in spring 2009, compared to two-thirds of Whites.<sup>26</sup> While further evidence is still in development, we suspect similar trends persist among other minority groups, particularly for people who are members of low-income families.

Of particular note is the impact that a lack of income can have on future generations, unable to afford the tools of innovation and thus barred from participating in America's increasingly digital society. A 2005 study by the Children's Partnership found that children from families with incomes that exceeded \$75,000 a year were twice as likely to have access to a home computer when compared to very low-income families.<sup>27</sup> Because people of color, on average, earn substantially less than their White counterparts, this income effect is especially burdensome for minority children. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these disparities hold true for Spanish-dominant Latinos and Native Americans as well.

The question of cost takes many forms in addressing the broadband disparities and lack of adoption we now face: how do we make computing devices more affordable? How can we reduce, contain and subsidize the costs of broadband services? What must we do to encourage broadband build-out, and consumer-friendly network maintenance that makes possible and enhances the online experience for all Americans?

One potential answer to these questions lies in our readiness to promote broadband access across non-conventional computing devices. Studies have shown that people of color are embracing wireless technologies faster than White Americans, and that they are increasingly making use of wireless broadband Internet access. The Hispanic Institute reports that 58% of African Americans and 53% of Latinos use mobile broadband, compared to 33% of White

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<sup>22</sup> Joint Center, *Broadband Imperatives*, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Id.

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> Horrigan, John, *Home Broadband Adoption*, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Wireless Internet Use*, (July 2009) available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/12-Wireless-Internet-Use.aspx> (last visited Oct. 26, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Lazarus, Wendy and Wainer, Andrew, *Measuring Digital Opportunity for America's Children: Where We Stand and Where We Go From Here*, The Children's Partnership, available at <http://www.childrenspartnership.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Publications&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=1089> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

Americans.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, according to Pew, one in four African Americans who do not have broadband at home have accessed the Internet with a cell phone or a smart phone.<sup>29</sup> According to Pew, “to an extent notably greater than that for Whites, wireless access for African Americans serves as a substitute for a missing on ramp to the Internet – the home broadband connection.”<sup>30</sup>

Comfort with cellular telephones, which have become nearly ubiquitous among all groups of Americans in recent years, appears to open the door to wireless Internet access as a logical and, in many cases, more affordable option for broadband. Latinos, many of them recent immigrants from countries where wireless phones are more common than wireline connections, are generally setting the pace in cell phone use. They consume more minutes and have a higher percentage of cell phone ownership than any other group.<sup>31</sup>

Although more research is needed on attitudes toward wireless and who uses it, mobile connectivity also may fit the lifestyle of some groups better than others. For example, younger Americans and recent immigrants may change their place of residence more frequently than other groups. For them, committing to home-based broadband may, therefore, be less appealing than wireless. Immigrants represent a growing element of the minority population. According to the Hispanic Institute,

[M]any immigrants arrive in the United States with a propensity for mobile use. Transition to smartphones and other similar devices seems an easy step, which may partly explain why immigrants are more likely to have cell phones even if they have relatively lower incomes than the average U.S. resident. Additionally, immigrants tend to be more mobile and have greater need for wireless services.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, because it is generally less costly to deploy, especially across large geographic regions, wireless broadband also may help reduce the broadband gaps suffered by people living in rural and tribal lands. Wireless broadband seems to be an area for increasing access to and adoption of high-speed broadband Internet services, particularly for communities of color, and we must develop new policies with this portable technology in mind.

Beyond the creation of affordable “on-ramps” to the Internet, we must likewise consider ways to better manage the affordability of broadband services. Our policies must enable us to reduce, contain or subsidize the costs of broadband services so that even the poorest among us has an opportunity to access them.

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<sup>28</sup> Hispanic Institute and Mobile Future, *Hispanic Broadband Access: Making the Most of Mobile, Connected Future*, (Sept. 15, 2009) available at [http://thehispanicinstitute.net/files/u2/Hispanics\\_and\\_Broadband\\_Access\\_0.pdf](http://thehispanicinstitute.net/files/u2/Hispanics_and_Broadband_Access_0.pdf) (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Pew, *Wireless Internet Use*, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> Hispanic Institute, *Hispanic Broadband Access; Making the Most of Mobile, Connected Future*, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

As noted by the Broadband Opportunity Coalition (BBOC) in a recent filing to the FCC, we must also guard against any policies that would have the unintended consequences of furthering America's digital divide.<sup>33</sup> Like the BBOC, we urge caution against policies that could disproportionately shift the costs of broadband services to the poor.<sup>34 35</sup> Before any new policy regime is implemented, we must fully understand its potential socio-economic implications.

We also understand that as we attempt to bring more Americans online, we should be mindful that we do not over-burden low-volume broadband users with the costs of maintaining services for high-volume users. Our hope is that one day all Americans will use broadband for some of its highest purposes, including telemedicine, telework, economic empowerment, and distance learning. We are well aware, however, that new users may not rapidly consume broadband services as such. It is for these low-volume users, particularly those entering broadband space for the first time, that we must ensure that the costs of broadband do not overwhelm its social value.

Even where service is available, if adopting broadband is too expensive, people will not use it. Therefore, pricing structures should be flexibly designed or subsidized to ensure available service that fits almost every household budget. Our charge is to increase digital equality and opportunity by making broadband connectivity a reality for all Americans, and to impart digital citizenship to all who call this country home. We, therefore, recommend that policymakers work with communities and private enterprise to:

1. Complete the deployment of broadband networks to unserved areas, including rural communities and Native American tribal lands, and link the networks to public anchor institutions and community-based organizations as supplements to home-based service.
2. Address affordability issues through initiatives such as federal general revenue funding subsidies for computing devices and broadband Internet service, and public-private partnerships that can be leveraged to create greater access and adoption opportunities, or other policies that overcome price barriers.

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<sup>33</sup> The Broadband Opportunity Coalition consists of the National Urban League, the National Council on La Raza, the Asian American Justice Center, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the National Association for the Advancement of colored people. See e.g. BBOC Letter to FCC available at <http://www.speedmatters.org/blog/archive/broadband-opportunity-coalition-letter-calls-for-balanced-regulation/> (last viewed Nov. 19, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> See resolutions by The National Black Caucus of State Legislators available at [www.nbcslonline.org/resolutions.html](http://www.nbcslonline.org/resolutions.html), *Resolution to Encourage the Deployment of Broadband Networks Without Net Neutrality* (2007) available at <http://nbcslonline.org/resolutions07.pdf> (last viewed Nov. 19, 2009); see also resolutions by The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators available at [www.nhcsl.org/policysection4.php](http://www.nhcsl.org/policysection4.php), *National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators Calls on Congress and the FCC to Draft Legislation and Regulation to Encourage the Rapid Deployment of Broadband Networks without Net Neutrality Amendments* (2006) available at <http://www.nhcsl.org/policysection4-2006.php> (last viewed Nov. 19, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> The authors of this joint statement wish to note that the overarching conversation on net neutrality is ongoing and that the authors' positions on this issue requires further study by all involved in order to achieve policy salience.

3. Implement grants for technology skills training and the development of community broadband centers for those with lower incomes.
4. Promote continued expansion of wireless broadband service as an alternative on-ramp to the Internet.
5. Modify the Universal Service Fund to focus on broadband connectivity for low-income households and unserved communities.
6. Engage in rigorous and thorough analysis and fact-finding before cautiously implementing policies that could yield the unintended consequence of increasing the digital divide.

### **GIVING CULTURE CONTEXT: MAKING BROADBAND RELEVANT TO SPUR ADOPTION**

Beyond accessibility issues like availability and price, relevance plays a substantial role in determining whether a person will adopt and use broadband services that may be readily at their disposal. For communities of color, access to culturally relevant content is particularly vital. It is through this content that we can better teach our communities the benefits of broadband and more readily engage a new generation of broadband users.

Today, when most people think about broadband they think of high-speed Internet access that enables them to consume high-volume files, like music and movies for their entertainment. However, these uses, while exciting, do not represent the full spectrum of possibility that broadband adoption brings. We have a profound new opportunity to use broadband-enabled software and technologies as engines of economic progress and prosperity. By incorporating broadband solutions into our daily lives, we can reduce the disparate impact that years of slavery, segregation, oppression and discrimination have had on our communities.

Broadband truly can be the great equalizer, and the time is now to create a new cultural awareness about the possibilities of digital inclusion for minority communities. The primary issues facing the people we serve and represent revolve around notions of fair play and equality with regard to education, economic opportunity, and the provision of healthcare and public safety services. By tying these cultural realities to broadband capabilities, we will be able to ensure that communities of color can play an even more active role in modern society.

Broadband solutions can be used to address an array of issues. Where we lack jobs or the skills to acquire well-paying positions, broadband can enable us to identify, train and employ a new cadre of American workers, skilled in using the technologies of today to increase their productivity and efficiency. We can use broadband to bring about the emergence of a new generation of entrepreneurs, well versed in the use of broadband-enabled services that better facilitate their ability to run global operations out of the comfort of their homes. We can use broadband to better educate children and parents by engaging in new distance learning and online education programs. Through the use of broadband-enabled telemedicine, we can better address the endemic health problems that disproportionately affect communities of color.

As elected officials daily charged with the task of securing the welfare of the American citizenry, we must be actively engaged in a campaign to educate our people, and apprise them of opportunities for broadband empowerment. We can play an integral role in changing habits of the mind and painting the picture of what a better, broadband-enabled America looks like for all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, language or tribal status.

We must, therefore, lead the charge in making broadband relevant for our communities. Broadband can be a universal technology platform, so we must demonstrate the multitude of ways that it can be used to enhance the lives of the people we represent. As we lead, we should lead by example, first by demonstrating our understanding and use of broadband technologies. Beyond promoting broadband educational and awareness campaigns, however, we can demonstrate the power of broadband by making more of our government-sponsored services available online.

In addition to making their services more accessible via the Internet, our state governments can also be a primary provider of online training and digital literacy initiatives to ensure that all constituents have the opportunity to access and benefit from the productive use of broadband-enabled services. For those who cannot readily access a broadband connection in their homes, we as state legislators must ensure that state government services are available via mobile devices and at public computing centers. We must likewise encourage broadband training initiatives at schools, libraries, and public computing centers so that no person interested in accessing our governments' services online would be prohibited from doing so.

Our work must be two-fold: to expose our constituents to new broadband possibilities, and to encourage broadband literacy and awareness by those who have yet to adopt the technology for themselves. To further our efforts at giving broadband cultural context, thereby making it more relevant to the communities we represent, we recommend that all governmental units should do their part to:

1. Increase the proliferation of e-government and other online services that enhance the value of broadband connectivity for every citizen.
2. Improve opportunities for digital literacy training, and support the creation of culturally relevant and other valued online content.
3. Develop digital training programs that teach people how to create digital content and applications and use a variety of e-enterprise and online education tools.

## **IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME—CREATING SUSTAINABLE BROADBAND OPPORTUNITIES**

The greatest broadband benefit we can impart to our communities and to the country is the promise of new economic opportunities, in the form of job creation, workforce sustainability and skills training. If current trends persist, broadband will continue to remain an engine of economic opportunity for this country.

According to a recent study issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, "the converging broadband sectors of telecom, media and IT [information technology] lead U.S. GDP growth, adding nearly \$900 billion annually and expanding at a rate that is two to five times faster than the overall U.S. economy. IT-related sectors will remain the fastest-growing areas of our economy over the next 10 years."<sup>36</sup> Likewise, nearly half of all jobs created in 2008 were in the broadband and IT sectors.<sup>37</sup>

Considering that workforce development and stabilization is presently among our top national priorities, an increased reliance on broadband-enabled services creates a win-win for our economy. Sustainable broadband adoption activities will continue to fuel economic growth in the years to come, and it will create new job opportunities for the American citizenry. As we increase the use and demand for broadband services, we will likewise increase the positive economic impact that the converging broadband sectors can have on our overall economy.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau's 1997 Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises, the number of minority-owned businesses (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaska Native) grew more than four times as fast as American firms overall from 1992 to 1997.<sup>38</sup> Minority-owned firms grew by 30 percent, compared to seven percent increase for all U.S. firms.<sup>39</sup> According to the U. S. Census Bureau's 2002 Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises, from 1997 to 2002: Asian-owned businesses grew by 24 percent; Black-owned business grew by 45 percent; Hispanic-owned businesses grew by 31 percent; and Native American-owned businesses grew by 84 percent.<sup>40</sup> This dynamic growth in minority-owned businesses signals just how important it is to bring broadband access to this critical business sector.

To support our national prosperity, we need to leverage broadband as a vibrant catalyst for American economic growth, particularly in minority communities. We must model our policies on the assumption that we are approaching an increasingly broadband-based economy. As such, we must strike a delicate balance between addressing our policy needs and creating opportunities for enhanced investment in and use of broadband technologies to further spur economic growth and productivity. We, therefore, recommend that policymakers:

1. Evaluate the current regulatory regime and identify the policies that have been successfully proven to stimulate public and private investment and innovation in

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<sup>36</sup> USTelecom, *Analysis of the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Broadband and Telecommunications GDP Projections* available at <http://www.ustelecom.org/Learn/TelecomStatistics.html> (last visited Nov. 19, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Eisenach, Jeffrey, *The Telecom Sector and the Economy: How U.S. Broadband Policies Are Working for America*, (Sept. 2009) <http://www.empiris.com/docs/Telecom%20and%20the%20Economy%20September%202008.pdf> (last visited Nov. 23, 2009)

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *1997 Economic Census Minority- and Women-Owned Businesses United States* available at <http://www.census.gov/epcd/mwb97/us/us.html> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Id.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2002 Economic Census Minority-and Women-Owned Businesses United States* available at <http://www.census.gov/econ/sbo/#minority> (last viewed Nov. 23, 2009).



broadband. For the policies that work, engage new discussions around creating new policies that could replicate similar results of success, and for policies that do not work, determine ways to improve upon or discard them.

2. Develop a system of checks and balances that would ensure that any regulatory regime encourages, rather than dissuades, public and private investment in broadband deployment and innovation. Ensure that any such policies likewise protect privacy, online safety and the reliable delivery of valued online content.

### **CALL TO ACTION: MOVING TOWARD INCREASED ACCESS, ADOPTION AND INCLUSION**

Throughout history, Americans of every race, ethnicity, geographic location, and economic situation, and from every walk of life have joined arms in the quest for equality. We have fought to achieve equality before the law, to ensure that every American has an equal right to a quality education, competitive job opportunities, basic human respect, and to speak through the power of the ballot.

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, our common quest continues as we pursue greater digital equality and broadband opportunities for the communities we represent. On behalf of our multiple constituents, for people of color across America, and for every citizen, we seek accessible, affordable, universal broadband adoption and use for every man, woman and child in America.

With broadband, all people can have equal access to the information technology and resources that will be so crucial to shaping our lives in the decades to come. We cannot guarantee that all will have the same success, but we must guarantee that everybody is granted the same access and opportunity that broadband can make possible.

The task ahead is too great, and the stakes too high to risk failure over divisive politics or indecision. We must act now, in one accord, mindful of the many things we have in common, and not distracted by instances where our views diverge.

Together, we can – and we must – move towards greater broadband access, adoption and inclusion for all Americans, and particularly for members of minority, low-income, non-English speaking, and rural or tribal communities. Digital equality is looming on the horizon. Creating broadband opportunities must be our rallying cry as we enter this next frontier of American life.