

COMMUNITY BROADBAND COALITION

February 13, 2006

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
508 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Co-Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
560 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Co-Chairman:

Community broadband networks offer the promise of increased economic development and jobs, enhanced market competition, improved delivery of e-government services, and accelerated universal, affordable Internet access for all Americans. In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, new technologies demonstrated the resiliency and reliability of communications systems that can be used by police, fire, and EMS departments every day. In the future, these locally deployed technologies can help first responders, volunteers, and local governments react quickly to disasters, particularly when old ways of communicating no longer work.

With President Bush having established a priority for universal affordable access to broadband technology by 2007, we urge your Committee to report favorably S. 1294, the Community Broadband Act of 2005, introduced by Senators Lautenberg and McCain and cosponsored by Senators Coleman, Feingold, Graham, and Kerry.

In just the past few years, our nation has lost its broadband leadership position. Having been 1st in the world in the 1990s, and 4th in 2001, the United States has fallen to 16th among industrialized nations in broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. In fact, only 30% of U.S. households subscribe to broadband services, a reflection of high prices, too few choices, and unavailability of attractive services. In fact, the only bright spot for the United States is in the deployment of broadband wireless access points, where the United States continues to rank 1st, in part as a result of the emergence of municipal systems. Many countries that are outpacing us in broadband deployment, including Canada, Japan, and South Korea, have successfully combined municipal systems with privately deployed networks to bring high-speed broadband to their citizens. The United States can match their success, but only if community leaders can develop networks that make sense for their communities, including public-private partnerships and systems wholly owned by municipalities.

At the turn of the last century, when the private sector failed to provide electric service to much of America, thousands of community leaders stepped forward to form their own electric utilities. Now, communities across America are ready to provide broadband access to their citizens, offering competitive alternatives for their consideration. This past summer, cities such as Philadelphia developed creative ways to partner with the private sector. In addition, the voters of Lafayette, Louisiana rejected an effort to limit their high-speed options by a margin of 62%-38% and decided instead to fund a municipal broadband network. More recently, in referenda held across Iowa, citizens in a majority of the communities voted to preserve the authority of their local governments to develop broadband networks. And in the past few weeks, the City of New Orleans announced a program to provide free wireless access to anyone with a laptop or other IP-enabled device in order to help revitalize the local economy.

The undersigned trade associations, public interest organizations, local government organizations, and private companies share a common commitment to enhancing the availability of broadband services throughout the country. We support the Community Broadband Act because its enactment will further this vital goal.

We look forward to working with you to bring broadband services to all Americans and to helping local governments respond to future disasters. You can help us accomplish this goal by favorably reporting S. 1294.

Thank you for your consideration.

AARP

ACUTA—The Association for Communications Technology Professionals in Higher Education

Amazon.com, Inc.

American Association of Law Libraries

American Library Association

American Public Power Association

Association of Research Libraries

Broadband over Power Line Industry Association

EarthLink Corp.

eBay, Inc.

EDUCAUSE

Fiber to the Home Council

Free Press

Future of Music Coalition

IAC/InterActiveCorp

Information Technology Association of America

Intel Corp.

League of California Cities

Media Access Project

National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors

National League of Cities

One Economy Corporation

Pronto Networks

Public Knowledge

Pulver.com

Public Technology Institute

Rural Broadband Coalition

Skype Communications S.A.

TeleCommUnity

Tropos Networks

United Telecom Council

The United States Conference of Mayors

Utah Telecommunications Open Infrastructure Agency (UTOPIA)

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation