Broadband and Media Policy

High-speed broadband networks are essential infrastructure in the 21st century, enabling economic growth, job creation, and improvements in education, health care, energy conservation, public safety, and more. Increasingly, Americans access news, information, and video entertainment over digital platforms.

Universal, affordable access to high-capacity Internet is essential to our nation's democracy and economy. Yet, despite considerable progress, significant gaps remain. More than 18 million Americans – including 25 percent of people living in rural communities – lack access to broadband at the FCC's 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload benchmark. While broadband access is a problem, so is broadband affordability. Too many Americans have only one choice for a high-speed broadband provider. Nearly 45 percent of low-income households don't subscribe to home broadband, and many only reach the Internet over smartphones, limiting their ability to apply for jobs or do homework online.

Public policy to promote investment in affordable, high-speed wired and wireless broadband networks, to close the digital divide, and to create good jobs in the telecommunications and media industries should be guided by these principles:

Universal Broadband: Just as government policies helped bring affordable telephone service to all, our public policies should ensure that every individual, business, and community has access to and can use high-speed Internet at a price they can afford, regardless of income or geographic location. The FCC's modernization of its low-income Lifeline program to support broadband and expansion of E-rate subsidies to schools and libraries are important digital equality achievements to build upon. Federal and state governments should encourage broadband deployment to facilitate universal access and close the digital divide.

Investment in Next-generation Wired and Wireless Networks: Speed matters on the Internet. Gigabit capacity is fast becoming the global standard. US policies should promote investment in

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higher capacity wired and wireless networks, giving consumers, businesses, schools, libraries, hospitals, and government agencies competitive choice driving innovation, service improvements, and price competition.

Consumer Protections: We are in the midst of a technology transition moving to all-Internet Protocol (IP) networks over fiber, coaxial cable, and 5G wireless. During this transition, public policy must continue to promote our nation's core values for communications: universal service, public safety, and consumer protection. Consumer protections, including privacy protections, should apply across the Internet ecosystem to both network and applications providers.

Good Jobs: Public policies should support the growth of good, career jobs with respect for workers' rights. Companies that violate labor laws should be held accountable.

Open Internet: Open Internet rules should promote free expression, innovation, and investment on the Internet. There should be full transparency, no blocking, no throttling (slowing down), and no unreasonable prioritization of legal content on the Internet.

Media Diversity, Quality Journalism: Media diversity is essential to a thriving democracy. Media ownership rules that bar companies from owning multiple TV stations in the same market, prohibit stations from attempts to skirt those rules through "shared services agreements" and "joint services agreements," and restrict the combination of local newspaper and TV stations are vital for local community needs and to preserve good jobs in print, video, and electronic media.

Local Oversight of Infrastructure: Localities play an important role in ensuring that broadband infrastructure is deployed safely in public rights-of-way and on public property. Our local elected leaders can also lead the way in addressing digital equity and promoting worker protections. Federal and state authorities should not preempt local authority over the permitting of wireless infrastructure and should instead work cooperatively with localities to ensure infrastructure is built safely and strategically to serve our communities.