

An Open Letter to President Donald Trump and the 119th Congress

On behalf of USTelecom members and the hundreds of thousands of people they employ who design, build and manage our nation's world-class broadband networks, I congratulate you as you answer the call to public service and begin your terms in office.

As innovators and connectors, we also extend our hand in partnership as we work together to shape new policies for a new era of American innovation.

The broadband technology we deliver offers policymakers the most responsive, efficient and effective means available to meet the critical needs of our citizens, our communities and our economy. From strengthening U.S. competitiveness, to fostering resilience in the wake of natural disasters, to unlocking the possibilities of AI, to delivering world-class education and healthcare, ever stronger, faster and more resilient broadband networks are essential to virtually all progress.

Broadband providers have delivered a strong foundation to build on. Our sector invested nearly \$95 billion last year in U.S. communications infrastructure, committing over \$2 trillion of private capital since 1996. Since 2015, as inflation ate away at household purchasing power with rising grocery prices, rents and energy bills, prices for the most popular broadband services actually declined by roughly 60%.

This progress is fueled by the fact that consumers have an abundance of broadband service choices today – from wired to mobile and fixed wireless to satellite and beyond – all competing to attract and keep customers. From a policy standpoint, broadband's transformative contributions have occurred not because of, but in spite of, profoundly outmoded government policies, which over time have too often revealed themselves as a feature, not a bug of U.S. innovation policy.

It is time to turn the page.

The good news? As the saying goes, there are few challenges that can't be solved by turning things on and off again. A hard reset of the relationship between government and the private sector, and how they work efficiently and dynamically together to advance U.S. interests, is long overdue.

What follows are actions that can be taken quickly to exercise bold leadership and put our nation on the fast track toward unlocking the future faster. Broadband providers stand ready to roll up our sleeves and work with the new Administration and Congress to get the job done.



Jonathan Spalter
President and CEO, USTelecom

Key Priorities

CHAMPION THE NETWORKS OF THE FUTURE

Outdated regulations that force telecommunications companies to maintain decades-old copper phone lines are a prime target for common-sense reform. This red tape directly undermines the clear priority to maximize resources to extend the reach, resilience and capacity of high-speed broadband.

Instead, market by market, providers are required to engage in long 'Mother may I' processes seeking government permission to stop providing plain old telephone service and deploy their own capital to meet consumer demand for modern, faster, stronger broadband networks.

Copper phone lines require massive expense and effort to maintain. As manufacturers stop producing outdated equipment, some network operators must resort to scouring eBay for parts.

Most Americans have abandoned their landlines for cell phones and other more advanced technologies. Moving away from regulations that force companies to preserve outmoded and unwanted technologies will enhance investment in the broadband networks of the future that consumers and our economy demand.

SECURE AND REFORM UNIVERSAL SERVICE

Americans voted for their elected representatives with the expectation that their vision for our nation and its governance will make their lives better. The country's longstanding commitment to universal service – connecting everyone, regardless of geography, to affordable, reliable communications – is essential to delivering on that promise.

The Universal Service Fund helps overcome the substantial cost barriers to connecting rural America. But the USF is now facing an existential threat in the courts. Legislative action is urgently needed to both reaffirm the clear bipartisan intent of Congress to maintain this commitment and reform how the program is funded.

Reform must begin by requiring Big Tech companies that benefit massively from universal connectivity to join in contributing to this vital national commitment.

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PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL ON BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

In 2021, Congress enacted historic, bipartisan legislation aimed at finishing the job of connecting all communities to high-speed broadband. Yet administration of the resulting \$42.5 billion BEAD Program has been bogged down under the weight of entirely unrelated political objectives and social mandates.

Given these developments, there is broad and understandable frustration about just how far program implementation has strayed from the original intent of Congress. Everyone wants to deploy broadband and reach universal connectivity. However, every unrelated kitchen sink issue we pile on top of that important objective slows the process, limits efficiency and effectiveness and fails to deliver the responsive, impactful government that Americans are crystal clear they want to see more of today.

The new NTIA should roll back rate regulation and other requirements that Congress never asked for, while retaining a significant role for fiber, the high-speed broadband gold standard. This would shed the unwanted baggage and accelerate what matters most—getting the work of connecting everyone done.

Restoring a tight focus on the mission—broadband deployment—can dramatically accelerate efforts to fill gaps in high-speed service, helping unlock economic opportunities and access to innovation throughout our country. Simply put, government can achieve far more in this instance by doing far less.

REVIEW ALL LEGACY REGULATIONS WITH FRESH, MODERN EYES

Bold leadership in removing outdated rules, many that pre-date the internet itself, could immediately and dramatically invigorate U.S. competitiveness and expand economic and other opportunities throughout our country. The fact that we had a 20-year debate over whether internet access should be treated like telephone service exemplifies the disconnect.

Much of our nation's status quo communications policy relates to a world of rotary phones and landlines, and telephone and television monopolies, when Amazon was a river and googol a complex math term. Yet rules, both large and small, written for that era persist — from requiring companies to maintain outdated networks to mandating quarterly reports on payphone usage. In fact, New York City removed its last public payphone in 2022.

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The new Administration should look at the regulations on the books with fresh eyes and a new mindset, asking some clear, common-sense questions: Does this rule make sense for American consumers in the modern world? Does it advance the nation's interests? Is it the best use of both government and industry's time and resources? Less money for nonsensical compliance means more money to invest in high-quality broadband service. Slimming the rulebooks and trimming the paperwork will help deliver the impactful, responsive governance America needs without the tax on time and cost that excessive bureaucracy takes.

BREAK THE FEDERAL PERMITTING LOG JAM

A functioning government is a non-partisan mandate. Yet nowhere is the ability of the gears of government to grind all progress to a halt more glaringly apparent than in the painfully slow process of obtaining the federal permits broadband providers require to make universal connectivity a reality. The longstanding frustration is palpable. Permitting requests can languish for months and even years. In Utah, one provider waited almost three years for permission to simply repair an existing fiber optic line on federal lands.

The fix is straightforward: Congress should green light speeding up approvals for more broadband projects on federal lands. With a third of our nation's land under federal control, federal permitting reform would provide an immediate adrenaline shot to the capacity, sophistication, reach and security of our nation's information infrastructure.

Legislation cleared the House last Congress and is poised and ready to move again. Leadership and a sense of urgency can get it over the finish line.

MODEL EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT ON CYBERSECURITY

Cybersecurity threats against our country, its critical infrastructure and our people have never been greater or more complex. Traditional government bureaucracy and top-down regulation have little chance of keeping pace with well-funded, agile and highly skilled state actors and criminal syndicates seeking to do our nation and our people harm.

The White House should lead a coordinated effort capable of slicing through bureaucratic silos to ensure agencies not only work efficiently with one another, but shoulder-to-shoulder with critical infrastructure providers toward a shared objective— keeping our nation secure. The bad guys in countries like China and North Korea don't face bureaucratic barriers; neither should the good guys—in government, industry and beyond—who need to be able to work together quickly, with agility and intelligence, to keep us safe.

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Broadband
2025

**Unlocking
the
Future Faster**

USTELECOM | THE BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

The Connected Road Ahead

Efficient, focused public and private investment in modern broadband networks not only keeps us all connected but also moves our nation and its economy forward as the undisputed global leader in the information age. The combination of advances in artificial intelligence, quantum networks and other innovations propelled by world-leading broadband infrastructure hold tremendous possibility for our nation. Yet, all too often, the rules governing our connected nation are counterproductive artifacts of a different era. It is imperative that government policies don't merely catch up with citizens' lives today, but accelerate the arrival of what's next.

Broadband providers stand ready to work with the Trump Administration and Congress to focus on timely government action that walks the talk of efficient, effective government. We must empower all of the nation with the full potential for opportunity and innovation that broadband makes possible.