

Remarks
Phoenix Center 2009 U.S. Telecoms Symposium
Washington DC, University Club
Congressman G. K. Butterfield
Thursday, December 3, 2009

First, let me thank all of you for being here today. I especially appreciate the opportunity to just share a few remarks with you during such an important event.

As you all know and have witnessed, the telecommunications industry continues to evolve at a tremendous pace. I never cease to be amazed at the steady research and innovation that is the catalyst behind the many advances that have been made in the industry, particularly since the development of the Internet. It wasn't that long ago when we were happy to dial-up on our home computers to reach this thing called the Internet, a literal universe of information where the world was seemingly at your fingertips.

In the wireless world we've gone from handheld mobile devices that once had to be carried around in small briefcases, to super mini-computers that can fit easily within the palm of your hand. We've gone from making a simple voice call, to sending a simple text message or an email, to sharing a basic picture over a wireless network, to now accessing the world with one stroke of a key from a device no bigger than a handheld calculator. With the advent of Broadband and high-speed Internet, we've unlocked the potential of whole communities across the globe to be a part of a vast world that, in the past, had not even been a figment of their imagination.

I've seen what Broadband can do for an economy struggling to make a successful transition to the 21st century. I know what a simple networked laptop or cellular phone can mean for indigent communities that hunger to reach out to a world geographically beyond their reach. I've seen the business

owner, the student, the single-mother, the grandparent, the entrepreneur, the ex-convict who have successfully used the advanced technologies and tools – which many in our society are fortunate enough to take for granted – to change not only their own lives, but the lives of others in their households, neighborhoods and communities. *This*, ladies and gentlemen, is why I'm happy to be here with you today – to discuss how we can continue to be forward thinking in our approach to technology, but in doing so, to develop public policies that will enhance the lives of the millions of people who look to us for leadership every day.

As some of you might know, I represent a very rural district in eastern North Carolina. We've been particularly hard hit by the downturn in the economy. My state, as are many others, is struggling with double-digit unemployment, and many of the 23 counties I represent are right at the top of the list in terms

of highest unemployment rates in the state. I represent a district that has some of the highest cases of diabetes and hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure. These are the people that look to me to work as hard as I can on their behalf every day I'm in Washington. I see the debate we are having right now about the ability to maintain a thriving, open Internet as central to their well-being. Let me explain.

My district represents one of the highest tobacco and pork producing areas in the country – two industries that have been particularly hard hit in recent years. As our economy tries to successfully adjust to the contours and the demands of a nuanced and global 21st century society, it is essential that my constituents are afforded every opportunity to access the information superhighway that would help bridge them into 2010 and well-beyond.

As we move forward, high-speed Broadband access will become an increasingly critical factor in determining potential economic development and prosperity. A report from the Brookings Institution found that for every one percentage point increase in Broadband penetration in a state, employment is projected to increase by 0.2 to 0.3% per year. For the entire U.S. private non-farm economy, the study projected an increase of about 300,000 jobs. Ladies and Gentlemen, I can tell you firsthand the struggles of trying to bring jobs to a community that has been especially hard hit by an economic downturn. In my estimation, Broadband is no less than essential to help bring jobs into communities like mine.

Globally, Broadband has transformed whole villages in Africa, is leading to economic empowerment and opportunity for women in the Middle-East and south east Asia. It is a source of job training, and a means for businesses to reach new markets

across the world. It is a means for remote communities to reach a physician and receive appropriate medical care. It is for *these* reasons that I have consistently advocated for the promotion and expansion of Broadband in my community and in my district.

Would we, here on the cusp of a new decade in the 21st century, deny anyone the right to an education or the right to receive appropriate medical care? Would we deny that young boy or girl – with all of the potential and imagination in the world – the pencil and pad that would set that potential in motion? I dare say that we would not, and this is how we must think about the prospects for Broadband in our communities.

Right now, the Federal Communications Commission is undertaking a rulemaking process addressing the subject of “net neutrality.” I’m happy to see that Commissioner Baker

was here with you earlier. I think she and her colleagues at the FCC are doing great work and have a mountain of decisions in front of them on a host of issues that have been bottled up for some time. However, as the net neutrality rulemaking process moves forward, I have to be concerned about the ramifications that this could have on the people and the communities that I represent.

I have all the confidence in the world in this new Administration and in the direction they want to take our country, from both a policy and leadership standpoint. However, if we fail to take into full consideration the unintended consequences of government regulation of the Internet, we run the risk of delaying critical Broadband expansion into the many unserved communities of this country. Let me repeat: we run the risk of stifling the critical

expansion of Broadband into unserved communities across this country.

Now, we'd be naïve not to recognize that there are interests on all sides of this issue that have much to gain or lose depending on where the pendulum swings. However, my concern lies with the people of those 23 counties I go home to every weekend; those people who can't search the millions of jobs on-line because they can't get a viable Internet connection; those people who can't get to a clinic, and who also can't benefit from advances in telehealth and remote monitoring that a robust Broadband network can provide. I don't think any one of us here is against the idea of an open Internet, but what I am against is putting potential obstacles in place that would inhibit an open opportunity to better yourself, your family, your church, or your community. Steady deployment of robust Broadband networks and increasing Broadband

adoption is more than integral to a growing and competitive society, it should be considered sacrosanct and the priority for just about anything that we do in telecom at the federal level right now.

In closing, let me again thank all of you for being here and for allowing me to share just a few thoughts with you. I particularly want to thank Larry Spiwak for all of the great work that is going on at the Phoenix Center under his leadership. I urge all of you to continue being at the forefront of the critical research necessary so that we policymakers can make informed decisions about the direction of this industry, and this country. As a Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, and of the Communication, Technology and the Internet subcommittee, I truly appreciate all of the tremendous work that you and other stakeholders do, and for asking the critical questions that move this great sector of our economy

forward. I am truly humbled for this magnificent award and look forward to working with you as the policy debates move forward. Thank you.