How Policymakers Can Close the Digital Divide

Broadband is an essential service that Americans turn to for every facet of daily life. Despite its importance, an estimated 42 million Americans don't have the ability to purchase wired broadband, and almost half of the country can't access the internet at broadband speeds. Rural, Tribal, and minority communities are particularly impacted by the "digital divide," with 26% of rural Americans and nearly half of rural Americans on Tribal lands lacking access to fixed broadband. Moreover, just 66% of African Americans and 61% of Hispanics report having broadband at home.

There are multiple reasons why so many are left on the wrong side of the "digital divide." For some, broadband isn't available, but for others, even if it's available, it's just not affordable. Even those with broadband access often find that the speed fails to meet their needs -- an especially worrisome fact during the pandemic. In order to close the divide, policymakers must take steps to increase broadband deployment, affordability, and quality of service. We share our suggested policy ideas below.

Policymakers Should Ensure Universal Deployment of Identical-Quality Broadband

- Subsidize Deployment Based on Accurate Data
- Promote "Open Access" Infrastructure
- Require Universal Buildout
- Prioritize Funding for Municipal Broadband and Other Alternative Providers
- Make More Licensed and Unlicensed Spectrum Available

Policymakers Must Ensure That Everyone Can Afford Broadband

- Subsidize Broadband
- Require Internet Service Providers To Offer an Affordable Option
- Collect Price Data
- Subsidize Devices and Support Digital Literacy
- Remove Overbuilding Prohibitions

Policymakers Must Ensure that Broadband is Reliable, Resilient, and Meets Consumer Needs

- Promote Network Resiliency and Reliability
- Regulate Technology Transitions
- Soley Fund Future-Proof Networks
- Empower the FCC to Regulate Broadband
- Prohibit Broadband Data Caps
- Collect Quality of Service Data