



October 29, 2007

Dear Members of the Senate Commerce Committee:

On behalf of Free Press and its more than 350,000 members and activists, I write to urge you to support S.1853, the bipartisan Community Broadband Act of 2007, during its scheduled full committee markup on Oct. 30. The legislation, introduced by Senators Frank Lautenberg, Gordon H. Smith, John Kerry, John McCain, Claire McCaskill, Olympia J. Snowe, Ted Stevens and Daniel K. Inouye, will help ensure that communities across the country may continue to deliver the economic and social benefits of broadband access to their citizens.

High-speed Internet access is fast becoming a basic public necessity – just like water, gas or electricity. But far too many Americans find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide, unable to get connected or afford expensive commercial service. Community Internet treats broadband access as a public utility, not a privilege, and promises to provide more citizens with affordable, universal access to high-speed broadband services using new technologies like state-of-the-art fiber-optic networks and Wi-Fi hot spots.

Local governments, schools, public-private partnerships, nonprofits and community organizations have been using community Internet to offer faster, cheaper and more reliable service than ever before. Indeed, broadband access has become essential to economic growth, education and health care. Affordable broadband keeps jobs and attracts new businesses. It gives children computer skills to succeed in college and the work force. It expands opportunities to benefit from telecommuting and breakthroughs in tele-medicine. Rural and low-income urban areas that are systematically underserved by DSL and cable modem service providers have also benefited from Community Internet's ability to bridge the digital divide.

The United States is falling far behind other world leaders in broadband availability. Americans pay more than 10 times as much as the Japanese or Koreans, and, in 2007, the U.S. dropped from 12th to 15th in the world broadband deployment in a ranking by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. Community Internet brings innovation and competition, and is critical to the ability of the United States to maintain any competitive advantage. As an organization with its mission of advancing the affordability and accessibility of broadband Internet in America, Free Press strongly urge you to support S. 1853.

Sincerely,

Ben Scott
Policy Director
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