

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Brian Imus, State Director
ph: (312) 291-0441, ext. 210
brian@illinoispirg.org

Public Interest Groups Urge Lawmakers to Support Broadband Plan that Serves the Public Good

Coming together on OneWebDay community groups highlight the need for broadband access in every community across Illinois

During his Sept 21st, 2009 address in Troy, New York President Barack Obama again stressed the importance of fair and open broadband access. "One key to strengthening education, entrepreneurship, and innovation in communities like Troy is to harness the full power of the Internet. That means faster and more widely available broadband as well as rules to ensure that we preserve the fairness and openness that led to the flourishing of the Internet in the first place. The President went on to state, "...the role of government is to provide investment that spurs innovation and common-sense ground rules to ensure that there is a level playing field for all comers who seek to contribute their innovations."

In a Sept 19th 2009 statement in Litchfield Illinois, Governor Pat Quinn also highlighted the need for investment in broadband. "We want to have world-class, high-speed networks everywhere in Illinois...The future of Illinois depends on our ability to use the latest in technology...everybody in – nobody left out – that's my philosophy."

Our report, *A Public Interest Internet Agenda* offers lawmakers broadband policy solutions that are tied to the common good and our prosperity. Connecting every citizen to the Internet at broadband speed is the key to economic development, improved healthcare and education, energy efficiency, robust democracy and open government

"Broadband access is crucial to economic, educational and democratic participation in Illinois and it's critical that government make consumer friendly choices that empower communities while bringing access to every corner of the state. Without consumer protective policies to guide them, the handful of corporations that sell broadband have done so at runaway rates, with poor service and have even avoided serving broadband to many of our most vulnerable communities. This report offers solutions to connecting communities while protecting consumers." Said Brian Imus, State Director IllinoisPIRG.

"Barriers like cost, a lack of technology education, and deficits in both hardware and software keep the Auburn Gresham community from fully participating in the global marketplace. We believe that broadband access is necessary to bridge the historical, physical, cultural, educational, and digital divide in our community," said Ernest Sanders, New Communities Program Manager and Director of Communications for the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation.

"As a small business owner in a relatively flat economy, it is very important for our establishment to embrace affordable resources and strategies like broadband technology to offer our customers the best shopping experience, i.e. the best product and environment for the best price," said Julie Welborn, co-owner of Perfect Peace Café & Bakery.

“Since broadband is becoming THE 21st Century medium of communication, think of what people without access to it will be missing increasingly in health, education, employment, etc. We've got to convert the digital divide to digital opportunity for all,” Said Charles Benton of the Benton Foundation.

“Access to the Internet can help address many of the complex problems that the U.S. faces today. By adopting this bold strategy to network our nation, policy-makers can give communities and individuals tools to achieve their true potential,” said Beth McConnell, Executive Director of the Media and Democracy Coalition.

“It's no accident that there was \$7.2 billion allocated for broadband in the stimulus bill,” said Nathaniel James, OneWebDay's Executive Director. “Everyone understands that the Internet is the pathway to economic opportunity, from educational achievement to success on the job. Even finding and applying for a job requires online skills and access.”

As lawmakers formulate a strategy to deliver broadband to every community, this unique and valuable contribution from public interest advocates should be considered. We recommend that lawmakers embrace the following core principles:

- 1. Every American should have access to Broadband communications.** Like the government's past efforts to extend telephone coverage there must be universal and open, non-discriminatory access to high-speed and high-quality broadband.
- 2. Good policy must be well informed.** Policymakers must have access to reliable data on where broadband presently exists, at what speeds, of what quality, by what provider, how it is used by consumers, why certain consumers do not use it, and how other consumers integrate it into their lives. These data must be as granular as possible, and should be made available in raw form on the Internet for public analysis.
- 3. Policy should promote competition, innovation, localism, and opportunity.** Locally owned and operated networks support these familiar core goals of communications policy, and therefore should receive priority in terms of federal and state support. Structural separation of ownership of broadband infrastructure from the delivery of service over that infrastructure will further promote these goals.
- 4. Government should use public resources wisely.** Policymakers should seek to leverage the use of resources and assets such as publicly-owned spectrum, fiber and rights-of-way to achieve the goal of universal broadband access to the Internet
- 5. Policy must stress digital inclusion and the service of traditionally disenfranchised communities.** Stimulating broadband supply is necessary but not sufficient to achieve the goal of universal broadband. Policymakers must also promote digital inclusion to stimulate broadband demand and ensure that all residents have access to the digital skills and tools necessary to take advantage of the Internet's enormous potential benefits in creativity, economic development and civic engagement. This benefits not just those on the wrong side of the Digital Divide, but all broadband users and our society.

A Public Interest Internet Agenda has been endorsed by over 40 local and national public interest organizations that work on media and telecommunications issues.

For more information or to download a copy of A Public Interest Internet Agenda, go to www.illinoispirg.org

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The Illinois Public Interest Research Group (Illinois PIRG) is a non-profit, non-partisan, public interest advocacy organization. For a copy of the report and more information visit <http://www.illinoispirg.org>

Greater-Auburn Gresham Development Corp. (GADC) works to foster and promote revitalization of the low-to-moderate income neighborhoods of Auburn-Gresham, Englewood and West Chatham. <http://www.gagdc.org>

Perfect Peace Café & Bakery is a destination eatery in the developing Auburn-Gresham community in the city of Chicago. <http://www.perfectpeacecafe.com/>

The Benton Foundation works to articulate a public interest vision for the digital age and demonstrates the value of communications for solving social problems. <http://www.bentonfoundation.org>.

OneWebDay seeks to build an organization that looks, feels, and works like the Web – a diverse, decentralized engine of human creativity that delivers value by pushing power to the edges of its network of organizers and partners. OneWebDay is an event that highlights the power of the Web and the threats it faces to a world-wide audience. <http://www.onewebday.org>

The Media and Democracy Coalition (MDC) is a collaboration of more than 30 organizations united to amplify the voices of the public in debates over media and telecommunications policies. <http://www.media-democracy.net>