

An Open Letter to President Biden and the 117th Congress:

Congratulations on being elected by the American people to lead our country through these challenging times. U.S. broadband companies stand ready to work with the new Administration, Congress and our many partners to advance the future of American connectivity.

“Broadband holds virtually limitless potential to help rebuild our economy, reinvent our health care and education systems, and improve virtually every aspect of modern life.”

The first 100 days of a new Administration and new Congress are critical to charting a clear, bipartisan course for our nation’s policy agenda. Whatever the challenge—COVID-19, economic recovery, racial equity, climate change, healthcare, education, job creation, or national security—broadband can and must play an essential role in any plan to lift Americans up and move our nation forward. Throughout this pandemic, when our citizens have needed them most, America’s broadband providers—and the networks we build—have delivered because of billions of dollars of investments and strong partnerships with government. Now more than ever we must sustain this progress together.

It is our sincere hope that our work ahead can prove a unifying turning point for the United States—one that includes a constructive and collaborative dynamic between the public and private sectors. Broadband holds virtually limitless potential to help rebuild our economy, reinvent our health care and education systems, and improve virtually every aspect of modern life. Confrontation squanders those possibilities. Collaboration toward shared national objectives can make them transformative.

You call them constituents. We call them customers. Working together, with a shared sense of commitment, clarity and coordination, we can advance the connected interests of all Americans. In that spirit of partnership, here are actions we believe should be prioritized in the first 100 days in order to maximize broadband’s potential to get us through the COVID-19 pandemic and building together for better days ahead for our nation.

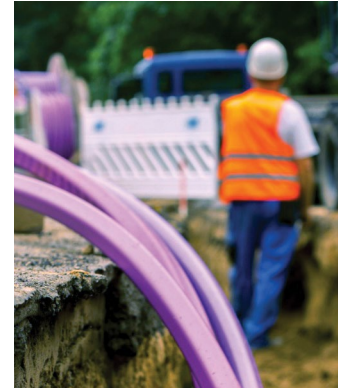


Jonathan Spalter
President and CEO, USTelecom

KEY PRIORITIES

Finish the Job of Connecting Every American

From COVID relief to budget decisions, take bold and decisive action to finish the job of connecting every American home, business and anchor institution to U.S. broadband infrastructure. Particularly amid a global pandemic, the fact that an estimated 18 million American homes do not have broadband access is unacceptable. Working together—public resources alongside private expertise, technology and networks—this is the most solvable of our nation’s leading challenges. Resources + political will = universal connectivity.



SPECIFIC 100-DAYS ACTIONS

- Advance legislation to rapidly and fully invest in the broadband infrastructure programs required to quickly and permanently close the digital divide in America. USTelecom members are ready to immediately go to work with government partners to build these networks, including fiber investment deeper into all corners of America.
- Fund the Broadband Data Act so the FCC can promptly map every home and business without broadband to ensure finite taxpayer resources are targeted efficiently and quickly.
- Ensure the broadband workforce continues to be designated as essential workers with ready and reliable access to PPE so they can safely do their jobs keeping the country connected.
- Move quickly to address antiquated policies that create barriers to broadband deployment and industry competition. From expedited permitting, to lifting mandates that require companies to sustain outdated networks rather than devote more resources to deploying next-generation networks, to rooting-out discriminatory pole attachment rates, all policies should be viewed with an eye toward removing barriers that impede getting broadband to everyone.
- Signal a clear and collaborative infrastructure policy course that encourages all to invest with confidence in the nation’s broadband future.
 - *Decisively reject any proposal that would treat broadband networks like a government utility. The coronavirus has challenged networks with unprecedented demand—and our members have risen to the challenge. Our nation’s recovery requires that we sustain and encourage this outstanding performance, not put it at risk under the heavy weight of bureaucracy and red tape.*

\$1.8
TRILLION

PRIVATE SECTOR
INVESTMENT IN
U.S. BROADBAND

- *Immediately halt DOD plans to establish its own commercial 5G network or select a single gatekeeper for its communications. Rather than working at odds with our nation's facilities-based broadband partners—which have the unique financial, operating and technical wherewithal, the vast fiber-based plant, and the needed economies of scale to get the job done—continue to work shoulder to shoulder with us to advance our nation's security and prosperity by quickly repurposing for consumer use as much government spectrum as possible through battle-tested, innovative auction processes led by the FCC.*

Tackle Broadband Affordability—Starting With Our Kids

Unlike the cost of most consumer goods and services, broadband prices are going down. Nevertheless, many still struggle to connect. We as a nation need to recognize that the digital divide is not solely an issue of access, but also of affordability and adoption. This will require a bold new initiative that engages the public, private, and non-profit sectors to ensure support is quickly in place to help all vulnerable Americans get connected and stay connected. We can start with the 17 million school-age children who have no broadband connection at home—and the shared declaration that no child in America should have to sit in a fast-food parking lot to learn.

CLOSING THE DIGITAL
DIVIDE REQUIRES
**REIMAGINING
THE UNIVERSAL
SERVICE FUND**

SPECIFIC 100-DAYS ACTIONS

- Launch and fast-track a major initiative that makes public resources available to ensure low-income students and all at-risk Americans have access to broadband at home.
- Announce a commitment to more broadly share responsibility for universal service in America. The current Universal Service Fund, which is evolving to focus on broadband connectivity, continues to be funded via an assessment imposed solely on telephone customers. This has led to an extremely regressive 28% (and rising) surcharge on consumer and business phone bills. Universal broadband is too important to our nation to be funded by one set of customers. We need to start over in pursuit of a more constructive path forward—including direct congressional appropriations and expanding the base of financial support for universal connectivity beyond just telephone consumers to include a broader cross-section of the Internet ecosystem, including its largest companies.

Any New Online Consumer Protections Must Be Modern, Consistent, and National

Consumers deserve core protections around privacy, freedom of expression, and other key areas in the open and thriving online world, just as they do in the physical world. Broadband companies have long supported—and delivered—open Internet principles for their customers. It's time the rest of the Internet played by the same rules. The same goes for privacy. Only consistent, modern, and national protections can safeguard consumers while promoting U.S. infrastructure investment and our innovation economy. Policy leaders must not look to rules from the past to govern the online future.

ROBOCALL SCAMS
HAVE BILKED

\$10
BILLION

OUT OF OUR MOST
VULNERABLE
CITIZENS

SPECIFIC 100-DAYS ACTIONS

- Insist on consistent national approaches so consumers across the country can trust they have equal protections under the law and companies can invest with the confidence that our nation will continue its global leadership under a cohesive, national innovation policy.
- View consumer protections through an inclusive and forward-looking lens. A modern framework must apply to all companies interacting with consumers online. Dusting off policies from the 1930s and even the 1990s doesn't deliver this across-the-board protection.
- Toughen criminal enforcement and step up international coordination to stop large-scale robocall scams. From pedaling fake COVID-19 cures to voter suppression efforts, these proliferating scams have spread misinformation and bilked \$10 billion out of our most vulnerable citizens.

Strengthen Global Leadership on Cybersecurity

The U.S. is far and away the #1 global target of cybersecurity threats, most of which originate from countries that are far from friendly to our national interests. The new Administration and Congress must take immediate action to signal that the U.S. will continue cohesive global leadership.

SPECIFIC 100-DAYS ACTIONS

- Quickly convene a senior level industry and government team of technology and policy experts to review the effectiveness of major federal public-private cybersecurity initiatives.
- Signal that the U.S. will reinvigorate its cyber engagement with global allies—from criminal botnet activity to international standards development for the Internet of Things security, supply chain interoperability and diversification.
- Adequately support American broadband providers by appropriately offsetting their costs to 'rip and replace' vulnerable network equipment from domestic U.S. infrastructure.

>50%

ALL GLOBAL DATA
BREACHES WILL
OCCUR IN THE U.S.
BY 2023

Elevate and Coordinate Technology Policy at the White House

The innovation sector of which our members are a central part contribute to over one-third of U.S. economic productivity. But policymaking and coordinating functions relating to our sector across the Executive Branch are often duplicative, non-strategic, and can lack effective coordination with innovators in industry. The National Economic Council and National Security Council were established to ensure close policy coordination across government in those essential domains. We need to do the same with respect to broadband and related technology policy matters such as cybersecurity, infrastructure investment, next generation network advancement, spectrum, privacy and beyond—helping drive one cohesive, rather than multiple competing national agendas, standards and investment programs.

SPECIFIC 100-DAYS ACTIONS

- Undertake a strategic assessment of how interagency technology policy development and coordination can be improved and streamlined, starting with reconstituting the national cybersecurity policy coordinating function at the White House.
- Recruit individuals from a diverse cross-section of our nation's innovation ecosystem—especially those with front-line expertise engineering, managing, securing, and supplying our nation's broadband networks—to serve in key technology policy and management roles in the Executive Branch, as well as to important advisory councils, such the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, from which they have been absent.
- Immediately rescind White House Executive Order 13950, which imposes limitations on diversity training by government agencies and contractors. Stand with leaders across corporate America, including U.S. broadband companies, who are committed to embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion—and to developing effective and impactful training programs in these areas.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Broadband—and the work, investment, and know-how of the companies providing it—has never been more important. We need to collectively harness this moment to drive more investment, progress, solutions, and innovation. USTelecom, and the broadband technology ecosystem we proudly represent, stand ready to work with you and your teams to make the most of broadband connectivity's promise for all Americans.