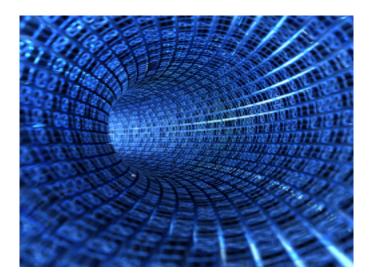# Broadband and Technology: Four Steps To Ensure Economic Growth

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At the end of 2010, the Federal Communications Commission approved [rules](#) intended to preserve open access to the Internet. The order provoked criticism from consumer groups and advocacy organizations who [argued](#) that the rules did not go far enough in protecting cell phone users.  With this discontent at the federal level, progressive state legislators can and should enact legislation that aims to achieve universal broadband access and adoption for their constituencies.  Because just like with other basic community needs like education, health care, and transportation, broadband access requires the involvement of state legislators to determine how these critical public structures will take place. Doing so is a necessity for our economic future - we cannot afford to languish in [17th place](#) in the world in broadband penetration, while competitor countries surpass us in technology and economic growth.

An issue that is likely to arise again this year is the right-wing's attack on local high-speed internet networks. Local entities have often taken power in their own hands to serve their communities' need for broadband services. State laws should protect, not block, the development of municipal systems, public-private partnerships, and other alternatives that promise to bring the benefits of high-speed internet to more people. Eighteen states already have laws restricting cities and towns from building their own high-speed internet networks. Precluding communities from accessing broadband is detrimental to their economic well-being. It's long past time we returned to the days when we were improving our infrastructure, not tearing it down.

As we have seen with health care, the environment, and workers' rights, progressive accomplishments at the state level can drive a national movement. ☐ State legislators can take the four following revenue-neutral and widely supported steps to lead in broadband policy (for a complete analysis, please see PSN's [broadband policy options report for 2011](#)):

- **Create a Broadband Task Force:** As each state has its own needs - a unique geography, a unique demography, and a unique economy - its policy makers must assess on their own how to best invest in broadband to achieve full access. To accomplish this, more than 22 states have established broadband councils or task forces, and out of these, 19 were created by the state legislative branch.

- **Map High-Speed Internet Infrastructure:** Mapping high-speed internet availability and adoption, and making that information accessible to the public, is an important tool for legislators and local planning groups who seek to evaluate the current status of their states' high-speed internet infrastructure and utilization.

- **Create and Expand Programs to Bridge the Digital Divide**: The federal government and states already have programs that subsidize telephone services for low-income and rural residents. With the success of this program, called the Universal Service Fund, we can direct a portion of those existing monies to high-speed internet. ☐

- **Launch Digital Literacy Programs**: Beyond investing in broadband infrastructure and finding ways to make broadband services more affordable, state legislators should promote investments in education and community media programs to overcome the digital divide.

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## Full Resources from this Article

Federal Communications Commission -In the Matter of Preserving the Open Internet

Media and Democracy Coalition -What MDC members say about the FCC's Net Neutrality Rule

Progressive States Network -Broadband Policy Options Report for 2011

This article is part of PSN's email newsletter, **The Stateside Dispatch**.

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