

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

Texas 2036 Applauds Bipartisan Group of 88 State Lawmakers Calling for a Broadband Plan

Texas 2036 CEO Margaret Spellings released the following statement today regarding the letter sent by state Rep. Trent Ashby of Lufkin and state Sen. Robert Nichols, of Jacksonville, and 86 state legislators representing both parties from urban, rural and suburban to Gov. Abbott calling for a statewide broadband plan:

A statewide plan to expand broadband access is badly needed and long overdue. [Texas 2036 commends state Rep. Trent Ashby, of Lufkin, state Sen. Robert Nichols, of Jacksonville, and 86 state legislators for the foresight and vision evident in their letter](#), and we hope Gov. Abbott builds on his record in addressing the digital divide by spurring the creation and implementation of such a plan.

Timing is of the essence. If a broadband plan is begun quickly, it can be completed in time for action next year, which will ensure Texas makes progress on this critical service.

Right now, roughly 1 million Texans do not have access to broadband internet that supports essential services like telemedicine and remote learning. These 1 million people embody Texas' digital divide. This huge population includes more than 31 percent of rural Texans. It also includes more than a third of the households in El Paso, Laredo, Dallas, and Brownsville — all ranking among the nation's worst connected cities.

At the onset of the pandemic, 1.8 million Texas students did not have access to broadband. Approximately 30% of disconnected students resided in rural Texas¹ and still don't have access, which risks significant learning loss.

The income gap is similarly stark: fewer than half of the state's households earning less than \$20,000 a year subscribe to fixed broadband, whereas 82 percent of households earning \$75,000 or more do.

All told the failure to connect Texans with broadband service costs Texas roughly \$5.1 billion in lost potential economic opportunity.

Further, Texas is one of only six states without a broadband plan, so we risk making our state less competitive for future federal funding to address the digital divide.

We believe broadband service provides a gateway to opportunity for Texans who can access it. Like paved highways and rural electricity, broadband service is now basic economic infrastructure. Communities without it will become opportunity deserts, cut off from the services and innovation driving 21st century economic growth. That will only become truer as

¹ Analysis Completed by Operation Connectivity Team Leads in Preparation for Executive Committee Meeting, July 2020

schools shift to online learning, doctors embrace telemedicine appointments and employers give up office spaces for Zoom meetings and work-from-home models.

Over the next generation, more than half of all Texas counties are projected to lose jobs or hold steady at current levels. A lack of broadband access will exacerbate those economic challenges.

To be sure, some Texans will choose to live without high-speed internet. But it should be a choice — no Texas community should be denied the profound advantages it offers people and businesses.

A state broadband plan, that is supported by dedicated staff to implement the plan next session and coordinate state investments, will help ensure that all Texans can access the economic and quality-of-life opportunities that broadband will open in Texas's 21st century economy.