January 2, 2007

President George Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush,

In 2004, you set an ambitious and critical national goal of achieving universal, affordable broadband access by 2007.

As you know, universal broadband availability would not only unleash an estimated $500 billion in economic growth and more than 1.2 million high-wage jobs, but it could help bridge the digital divide and unleash a new wave of innovations, transforming almost every aspect of our lives.

But, as 2007 begins, we appear to be far from achieving your broadband goal.

- The United States has now fallen to 15th among industrialized nations in deploying broadband services.
- Only 25 percent of U.S. adults in rural areas have broadband services in their homes, reflecting too few choices, unaffordable prices, and limited (or lack of) service availability.
- The broadband penetration rate in rural areas is almost half the rate in urban and suburban households. Though growing, rural Internet penetration has remained roughly 10 percentage points behind the national average.
- In addition, less than 10 percent of households with incomes below $25,000 have a broadband connection.

The administration has taken some important steps forward; however, it is unfortunately only too clear that too many Americans are being left behind without broadband choices and the chance to participate in the information age economy. To achieve your goal, we need broadband pipes that are bigger, go faster, and extend further into every corner, community, and city in America – and we need them right away.

In this next year, policymakers must answer the central question of how we become a digital nation and extend the benefits of broadband and the opportunities it delivers to all Americans. Broadband and the applications it enables will unquestionably qualify as the dominant communications medium of the 21st century. Without a strong, comprehensive policy commitment to developing our broadband technologies and applications, we
cannot hope to correct the problems that have plunged us down the ranks of
global competitiveness. We need policies that give the “green light” to
investment in communications infrastructure in rural and low-income
America with a strong commitment to competition, accountability,
efficiency, and oversight.

Our nation’s commitment to ubiquitous and affordable communications has
never been more important. Standing at the threshold of an information
technology revolution, we cannot and should not abandon or weaken our
guarantee of universal, affordable communication access for all Americans.
Instead we must unleash the rivers of data and opportunity that broadband
can enable, and extend prosperity to a new generation of Americans.

Therefore, to restore the country’s Internet competitiveness and meet your
universal broadband goal, I urge you to:

1) create a national broadband strategy with set benchmarks,
deployment timetables, a commitment to demand drivers, and
measurable thresholds;
2) with analog phone penetration nearly universal, develop federal
policies to transition us to fully digital communication technologies –
making broadband based communication as universal as telephones
are today; and
3) protect our traditional values in the 21st century – providing
opportunities for all, including people with disabilities, to participate
in the digital economy, using information age tools to ensure public
safety, and respecting the privacy of all Americans.

There are no easy solutions to the challenges of extending broadband’s reach
to every American. But these challenges must be addressed based on the
same principles that have always guided progressive communications policy
— a commitment to ubiquitous, affordable access to the most important
technologies of the era.

Sincerely,

Charles Benton
Chairman and CEO