PART II— INCLUSION

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY. For too long, the geographic limitations of one's life have determined access to many critical resources—employment, schools and services. Too often, we can predict the outcome of children's lives by the ZIP code in which they live.[1] People are shut out from economic and social opportunity by blighted neighborhoods, lack of sustainable employment and failing schools—excluded from making informed choices about their family's future.

Access to broadband is the latest challenge to equal opportunity, but it also offers new and innovative avenues to achieve it. Broadband can be a platform for significant economic, cultural and social transformation, overcoming distance and transcending the limitations of one's physical surroundings. Americans can use broadband to take online classes and read digital textbooks. They can utilize broadband to make and maintain community connections and obtain information about their health care. They can use broadband to bank, shop and apply for jobs. In these many ways, broadband can help create opportunity.

Yet approximately 100 million people in the United States do not use broadband at home.[2] Some of these Americans do not see the need for the technology; they may not value the extra speed broadband delivers or do not think it is relevant to their day-to-day lives. And some will never choose to subscribe to broadband, just as a small percentage of Americans do not see the need for television or telephone service.

But for others, lack of broadband is not a simple choice. More than 14 million Americans do not have access to broadband infrastructure that can support today's applications. Some cannot afford broadband service or the cost of a computer. Some lack the basic skills needed to take advantage of broadband. Still others may only get service via satellite.

The cost of this digital exclusion is large and growing. For individuals, the cost manifests itself in the form of lost opportunities. As more aspects of daily life move online and offline alternatives disappear, the range of choices available to people without broadband narrows. Digital exclusion compounds inequities for historically marginalized groups. People with low incomes, people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, people living on Tribal lands and people living in rural areas are less likely to have broadband at home. Digital exclusion imposes inefficiencies on our society as one-third of Americans carry out tasks by means that take more time, effort and resources than if they had used broadband. Since government agencies must maintain both offline and online systems for transactions, many government services are not as effective or efficient as they could be.[3]

Like the costs of poverty, it is difficult to quantify the costs of digital inequality. It is certain, however, that people will not experience the promised benefits of broadband—increased earning potential, enhanced connections with friends and family, improved health and a superior education—without a connection.

Some of the recommendations in Part I of this plan (Innovation and Investment) discussed improving the economics of deploying and upgrading networks, both in unserved and served areas. More spectrum for wireless broadband, reducing the cost and complexity of access to utility poles and rights-of-way, ensuring fair prices in the wholesale market for backhaul service and implementing policies to stimulate broadband demand will ultimately push the network farther into unserved areas. Unfortunately, this will not finish the job of connecting people to broadband, since many areas of the country are just too expensive to serve without government support.

Part II (Inclusion) makes recommendations to ensure that any American who wants to subscribe to broadband can get the service. Chapter 8 sets a path to providing broadband to all Americans by extending the network through public investment in privately owned infrastructure. Chapter 9 examines the barriers many Americans face in adopting broadband—such as cost, digital literacy and relevance—and considers specific programs to reduce these barriers.

At stake is the equality of opportunity on which America was built. The nation needs to provide everyone with the opportunity to join the world that broadband is helping reshape.

PART II ENDNOTES

1 *See generally* Susan Mayer, What Money Can't Buy: Family Income and Children's Life Chances (1997).

2 John Horrigan, *Broadband Adoption and Use in America* (OBI Working Paper No. 1, 2010); Omnibus Broadband Initiative, The Broadband Availability Gap (forthcoming). *See* U.S. Census Bureau, USA, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html (last visited Feb. 26, 2010) (providing general population numbers).

3 Toby Bell, Gartner Res., Success Factors Emerge from e-Forms Engagement for U.S. Army 3 (2008) ("The Army estimates that moving nearly 2,400 forms online will save $1.3 billion each year."). (The National Broadband Plan contains several references to Gartner. The Gartner Report(s) described herein, (the "Gartner Report(s)") represent(s) data, research opinion or viewpoints published, as part of a syndicated subscription service, by Gartner, Inc. ("Gartner"), and are not representations of fact. Each Gartner Report speaks as of its original publication date and the opinions expressed in the Gartner Report(s) are subject to change without notice.) IRS, Advancing *E-File* Study: Phase 1 Report—Executive Summary, v1.3, Case No. 08-1063, Doc. No. 0206.0209, at 13 (2008), *available at* http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/irs_advancing_e-file_study_phase_1_executive_summary_v1_3.pdf; Jill R. Aitoro, *IRS Continues to Pay Millions to Process Paper Tax Returns*, NextGov, Sept. 23, 2009, http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090923_7490.php.