

In August, Vice President Joe Biden announced \$1.8 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for broadband projects that will create jobs and expand economic opportunity. These funds couldn't be timelier, considering reports that jobless claims in the United States have risen to the highest levels in nine months, fueling fears that the private sector may report a net loss of jobs in August for the first time this year.

We aren't out of the woods yet in terms of our economic recovery, but I am encouraged by the announcement of broadband investments that quickly will put people back to work and lay the groundwork for sustainable economic growth in the future. I am hopeful that we, as a nation, will capitalize on the remarkable opportunity that this broadband expansion now presents.

As founder and chairman of St. Louis-based World Wide Technology, which specializes in technology products, services and supply-chain solutions, I have seen firsthand the truly unique benefits that today's advanced technologies can offer an individual, a business and a community. I have seen how properly deploying these technologies can help businesses reduce costs, increase profitability and improve a company's ability to serve its customers effectively. I am also a strong believer that these benefits go beyond the walls of the tech-savvy businesses that embrace them by bringing job opportunities, lower prices and better customer service to the individuals and communities that surround and support them.

Given all of this, it should come as no surprise that I support any efforts, private and public, to expand broadband technology. High-speed Internet is one of the greatest services available today. I am confident that expanding access will create real, meaningful opportunity for individuals, businesses and communities across the country. I am concerned, however, that while this opportunity begins to spur our recovery, many without access will be left behind — and that is something that our nation simply can't afford. If we truly are to capitalize on the opportunity that we are being given, we need to make sure that everyone has access — and that access is affordable.

Affordable access to technology in our early years and then access to the Internet made it possible for me to launch World Wide Technology in 1990 and build the company from the ground up. And, today, thanks to hard work and the continual investment in technology improvements, World Wide Technology has become a multi-billion dollar firm employing more than 1,300 people. Without access to affordable technology in 1990 when I was just getting started, it may not have been possible.

I know there are other stories out there like mine, stories about how access to affordable technology can open doors that didn't seem to exist before. I also know that if we stay committed to expanding affordable Internet to all Americans, there will be a number of inspiring and

impressive new businesses that will pave the way to our economic recovery. America is home to the best and brightest — and with the right tools we can accomplish great things.

President Barack Obama and many policymakers have recognized the importance of expanding broadband access to every American, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds demonstrate a strong commitment to reaching this goal. It is important that we support this effort and don't let anything stand in the way of progress. As net neutrality is being discussed in Washington, D.C., it is critical that any policy outcome preserve the private investment necessary for building world-class networks and achieving universal broadband.

We must make sure that all Americans have access to and an understanding of the opportunities available through online connections. Only then can we truly tap into the full potential of each and every individual.

David Steward is the co-founder and chairman of St. Louis-based World Wide Technology and an Internet Innovation Alliance Broadband ambassador.

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