

September 26, 2016

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Dear presidential debate moderators,

Throughout this year's campaign, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have declared that updating our country's infrastructure is critical to maintaining America's global competitiveness and supporting economic development. As the first debate will focus on "[achieving prosperity](#)," the 21st century's essential infrastructure – affordable high-speed internet access – must be part of the conversation.

Since the creation of rail and highway systems, our understanding of infrastructure and critical services has continued to expand. In addition to transportation, electricity, and water, access to affordable high-speed internet is becoming a basic requirement for modern life, from obtaining healthcare and finding a job to connecting communities and participating in our democracy.

Unfortunately, many Americans still do not have affordable access to internet that meets their needs. According to the FCC's [most recent Broadband Progress Report](#), approximately 34 million Americans lack access to truly high-speed internet.

The implications of this gap are clear. Nearly 5 million households with school-aged children [lack high-speed internet service](#). Many of these students struggle to do their homework, with [seven out of 10 teachers](#) reporting that they assign homework that requires internet access. A 21st century education that adequately prepares our students for the jobs of tomorrow depends on the strength of their Internet connection today. Americans cannot afford a "homework gap" that places our children and our economy at a disadvantage with the rest of the world.

In the same ways that trains, highways, and telephones have long powered the way we do business and share ideas, internet infrastructure is our country's economic driver for the 21st century. Investing in high-speed internet access will keep our citizens and businesses competitive worldwide and support opportunity for all.

Americans agree that the next president must make this vision a reality. According to recent polling, 64 percent of Americans believe that the next president should make [expanding internet access a priority](#). A majority also agree that the benefits of improving internet access to improve children's education outweigh the potential costs to taxpayers.

Right now, however, our internet infrastructure and lack of affordable broadband options actually exacerbates existing disparities. Studies suggest that home broadband adoption rates are lowest among African Americans (54 percent), Latinos (50 percent), families earning under \$20,000 (41 percent), and rural residents (55 percent). Adoption rates have even plateaued over the last few years, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). Pew and other researchers have found that the high price of broadband access is the most significant barrier to adoption.

With this in mind, voters must understand the presidential candidates' plans for broadband access. Both candidates have promised major investments in infrastructure development, and broadband internet should be a part of these plans.

We, the undersigned groups, strongly urge you to ask the candidates the following question:

“Home broadband internet access has become an essential tool for education, employment, civic engagement, and even healthcare. Yet 34 million people still lack access to affordable high-speed internet. What will you do as president to help expand access to affordable high-speed internet for everyone in America?”

In the face of [ongoing calls](#) to hear more from the presidential candidates about expanding affordable internet access, both candidates should use these debates to make their plans clear. Infrastructure investments last for generations, and voters deserve to know how the presidential candidates will ensure that Americans can use this essential technological tool.

We look forward to a productive discussion in the debates about the best policies to promote economic opportunity and a strong economy in the United States. We hope that you will consider challenging the candidates to discuss expanding affordable high-speed internet access and make their stances clear during the debate.

Respectfully,

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