

**From:** [Geldaker, Kate \(Klobuchar\)](#)  
**To:** [BOCrfc2015](#)  
**Subject:** Comments from Senator Klobuchar  
**Date:** Wednesday, June 10, 2015 6:25:18 PM  
**Attachments:** [20150610 - Klobuchar Broadband Opportunity Council Comments.pdf](#)

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Hello,

Attached are comments for the Broadband Opportunity Council from Senator Amy Klobuchar. Please let me know if there are any questions.

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AND TRANSPORTATION  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 10, 2015

The Honorable Penny Pritzker  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorary Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

*Re: Broadband Opportunity Council Notice and Request for Comment, Docket No. 1540414365-5365-01*

Dear Secretaries Pritzker and Vilsack:

Broadband services are transforming the way Americans live, do business, and communicate. Ensuring access to high-speed broadband boosts American competitiveness. I am pleased that President Obama continues to focus on the need for investment in 21<sup>st</sup> century communications infrastructure. The creation of the Broadband Opportunity Council (Council) is an important opportunity for government agencies, businesses, states, and other stakeholders to weigh in on how we can continue to increase broadband investment and adoption. As a member of the Senate Commerce Committee and a long-time advocate of expanding broadband, particularly to rural areas, I would like to offer my comments to the Council on this important issue for our country.

As I travel around Minnesota, I often hear from community leaders, residents, and businesses about their need for access to reliable broadband. However, their ability to attract these services varies. Rural residents often have lower speeds than those in urban areas. Additionally, there are still lower adoption rates among seniors and low-income households. The federal government can encourage investment and adoption of high-speed broadband, both wired and wireless, by promoting and strengthening existing federal programs, improving coordination with states, advancing public-private partnerships, and modernizing infrastructure.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has successfully overseen the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) which has invested \$4 billion into broadband projects around the country. An independent study released by NTIA shows that these grants are projected to increase economic output by as much as \$21 billion annually. BTOP also supported broadband adoption programs to encourage more people to realize the benefits of Internet access. I believe that the Administration should support efforts to reauthorize the BTOP program and continue investment in broadband deployment and adoption programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service (RUS) continues to be a vital program for many rural telecom providers by providing financing and long-term loans that support broadband investment. I encourage the RUS to continue to find ways to advance investment by rural service providers.

Coordination with states is also an important tool to advancing broadband. Minnesota continues to invest state funds into new broadband projects. Minnesota's Office of Broadband within the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development should be a resource to the Council. Last year they invested nearly \$20 million in grant funds to projects across Minnesota. NTIA and RUS should partner with these state investment initiatives and provide any matching or additional funding support. Collaboration can help leverage investments that will make overall investment in our nation's broadband stronger.

Collaboration and streamlining investment in broadband deployment projects also depends on having access to service information. The National Broadband Map is an important tool for communities, businesses, and local governments. It was created to encourage economic growth through information. States are contributing information to this interactive tool on an ongoing basis. The federal government should continue to support the National Broadband Map going forward through partnerships with all 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

In 2012, President Obama issued an executive order (EO) entitled *Accelerating Broadband Infrastructure Deployment* to streamline broadband deployment on federal lands, buildings, rights of way, federally-assisted highways and tribal lands. Included in this EO was an initiative known as Dig Once, which was derived from my legislation the *Broadband Conduit Deployment Act* and aims to promote the simultaneous installation of underground broadband conduit with federal transportation projects. Since the 2012 EO was issued, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has worked in conjunction with state transportation officials to identify best practices to accommodate broadband infrastructure. I believe that this was a positive first step, however, a 2013 report by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) states that "very few states have implemented statewide Dig Once policies." Therefore, I urge the Council to include a recommendation in their review that furthers Dig Once policies and encourages more states to adopt policies that will expand high-speed broadband by cutting costs and streamlining construction.

Opportunities to streamline deployment are not limited to construction and wireline based broadband service. More and more consumers are dependent on mobile broadband access through devices like smartphones, tablets, etc. Therefore, NTIA should continue to work with federal agencies to identify spectrum that could be made available for commercial use. I applaud the efforts of NTIA Administrator Larry Strickling in this area and urge continued action.

Additionally, mobile coverage in rural areas continues to be a challenge. One of the reasons for this is the need to invest in cell sites in areas with low population density. However, rural Americans deserve to have access to the same services and technologies as those who live in urban areas. For example, more and more farmers are using mobile broadband services to improve their productivity and conduct business. The federal government can help streamline the permitting processes for placing broadband infrastructure on federal buildings, lands, or

rights of way by creating a standard application process for all federal agencies, setting a predictable fee structure, and better utilizing electronic applications. Additionally, it should be a priority to share information with state and local authorities as well as wireless carriers interested in deploying advanced communication services in rural America.

Public-private partnerships are a way to promote broadband expansion and adoption. FirstNet, is one example. As FirstNet deploys the vital, interoperable public safety network across the country, there could be additional opportunities to expand mobile broadband coverage in areas lacking adequate access.

As you hear from stakeholders, I also urge you to also seek comments from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). While the FCC is not a part of this Council, I believe that the FCC's expertise and experience in meeting their statutory mandate to advance the availability of advanced communications services like high-speed broadband will be beneficial to the goals of the Council. The FCC also continues to protect the public interest and competition in the broadband marketplace.

Finally, I encourage the Council to make the comments it receives from all stakeholders public so that they can contribute to a pervasive national conversation about broadband that extends beyond Washington, DC.

Thank you for your ongoing attention to these important issues. I look forward to your report. Please let me or my staff know if we can provide any further information as you make your recommendations to the President.

Sincerely,



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator