



Community Broadband

The Internet is a gateway to information that educates the public, and a forum that Americans need to participate in our democracy. Access to high-speed, broadband Internet service is becoming increasingly necessary to participate in modern life. Analysts predict that in the not-too-distant future, all media – television, radio, telephone, movies, video games, web content – will be delivered via the Internet.

Communities throughout the country are finding that they can provide more efficient, affordable and accessible broadband Internet service than the telecom giants currently dominating their markets. **Community Wireless Networks** use unoccupied space on the public airwaves to provide dependable high-speed Internet connections to homes all across America without the high cost and hassle of traditional phone and cable wires. This technology has the potential to revolutionize how we create, distribute and access information.

Municipalities throughout the country are setting up broadband service in their communities in the same way they provide electricity, gas and water. But in an effort to stifle competition and protect their profits, corporate interests such as Verizon and SBC are pushing bills in state legislatures that would prohibit communities from setting up wireless networks, even in rural and low-income areas not currently served by large providers. If the telecommunications companies are victorious, they will control and decide who gains access to the Internet based on who can afford to pay their fees. That's particularly troublesome in an era of large mergers and consolidated ownership, where the number of information gatekeepers is increasingly waning.

Common Cause believes the Internet should be accessible to everyone, and delivered at the highest efficiency and lowest cost possible. We have joined local governments and public interest groups across the country in a grassroots campaign to fight legislation that would ban cities and towns from setting up wireless networks.

Digital Democracy

Thomas Jefferson said that "information is the currency of democracy." Community wireless networks help our democracy by

- Giving local governments the resources to provide secure online voter registration and information about polling places. Local governments can also use the networks to provide other e-services such as online tax advice and payment.
- Allowing citizens to watch candidate debates, local government meetings and town hall forums that are streamed live online. The Internet serves as an alternative to television and radio stations that continue to cut back on local politics.

To learn more, visit us at www.commoncause.org