



State of Illinois



OFFICE OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR PAT QUINN



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GETTING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Everyone recognizes the importance of the Internet. In just the last few years we have seen a boom in Internet applications which have created new opportunities for economic development, education, public safety, and civic engagement. All media – including television, radio, and news content – will be provided over the Internet in the near future. It is clear that access to broadband Internet is the key to empowerment in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, the United States continues to fall behind the rest of the world in broadband Internet access. Just a few years ago, we stood at the head of the pack. But in the past year alone, we have dropped from 14th to 16th place in broadband penetration. One recent study estimates that the United States is at 19th place worldwide.

The State of Illinois fares no better than our nation as a whole. According to the most recent FCC data, Illinois ranks in the bottom half of states when it comes to broadband subscribers. If Illinois residents are to be prepared for today's knowledge-based global economy, our use of broadband Internet must improve dramatically. Illinois cannot afford to leave any community, neighborhood, or individual behind when it comes to connecting to the Internet.

Citizens and local leaders across the state have begun to recognize that the survival of our towns and cities depends on better telecommunications access. I support their efforts, whether they focus on traditional DSL and cable access, or emerging products such as Broadband Over Powerlines (BPL). There are many technologies available to provide broadband Internet, and different options are appropriate for different projects.

One option that I urge local governments and businesses to consider is wireless Internet service. Many communities and ISPs have turned to wireless Internet because it is economical to deploy and easy to expand. Wireless access is also available anywhere within a network coverage area. This means that anyone from first responders to residents enjoying a day in the park can have access to the Internet.

Recognizing these benefits, many Illinois communities are already looking at providing wireless Internet service. The City of Chicago has announced plans for universal wireless service within its boundaries. Illinois' second-largest city, Aurora, has also announced plans for a citywide network. Even the small town of Homer in Champaign County has committed to providing wireless Internet. ROC-Net, a Rockford-based provider, is working with county and local officials and business leaders to bring wireless access to ten underserved northern Illinois counties.

The Illinois Main Street Program is also joining the chorus of voices advocating wireless Internet access. Last year, I announced two \$20,000 grants to help Illinois Main Street towns – Quincy and Mt. Vernon - build wireless networks in their downtown districts. With wireless Internet throughout downtown, people will be able to do work, send email, and read news sites while sitting in the local café or restaurant. By opening the door to broadband access on Main Street, these towns will give residents and visitors one more reason to patronize downtown businesses or spend a on main street.

Wireless communities across Illinois have resolved not to be left on the wrong side of the digital divide. As the chairman of the state's Broadband Deployment Council, I applaud them for their efforts, and urge county and local officials statewide to work toward the same goal. For more information, please visit www.IllinoisConnect.org.