



Consumer Federation of America



April 6, 2006

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C 20515

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C 20515

Dear Representatives Blackburn, Inslee and Baldwin:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the American Broadband for Communications Act and for your commitment to finding solutions to the problem of inadequate access to high-speed Internet for consumers in rural areas and underserved urban neighborhoods. We applaud your commitment to this important issue and strongly support your legislation.

Although high-speed Internet adoption has been rising, the United States still lags far behind other countries in broadband adoption. While the problem of limited choice in providers and high cost exists throughout the United States, the problem is particularly acute in sparsely populated areas, where consumers may not even have a single provider to choose from. Broadband adoption in rural areas is less than half that of urban and suburban areas.

Fortunately, wireless, or Wi-Fi, broadband, because of its low deployment costs and ability to reach distant consumers without costly infrastructure or equipment, offers the greatest opportunity for providing broadband services and new competitive choices to consumers who currently lack them. Indeed, today, wireless Internet services providers and communities are using the airwaves to deliver wireless broadband to consumers who have never before had access to it. Wireless broadband services offer the promise of increased economic development and jobs, enhanced market competition, improved delivery of e-government services, and accelerated universal, affordable Internet access for all Americans.

Unfortunately, airwaves suitable for wireless broadband are in short supply. Currently, Wi-Fi broadband providers must rely on airwaves that limit the ability of wireless signals to pass through walls, forests and other obstacles. This makes wireless broadband less viable for communities in densely forested areas and regions with uneven terrain. Without access to airwaves that allow signals to penetrate these obstacles, even Wi-Fi broadband will be unavailable for these remote areas.

Your legislation, by directing the Federal Communications Commission to open currently unused broadcast airwaves – known as empty channels or white spaces – for unlicensed use will provide new opportunities even for the most remote areas of the country. Each television market in the United States has fifty channels allocated for over-the-air, broadcast television. However, in most markets, fewer than half of these channels are actually used by television stations. And in most rural areas, there are more empty channels than used channels. The American Broadband for Communities Act of 2006 will allow communities, innovators and entrepreneurs to tap that valuable but unused resource to bring high-speed Internet to thousands of small towns without broadband access, helping to build stronger, vibrant communities.

Thank you for your leadership on and commitment to this important issue and for working for meaningful, market-based solutions to the problem of inadequate and unaffordable broadband. We look forward to working with you toward passage of critical legislation to free unused white spaces.

Sincerely,

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Consumers Union

Ben Scott  
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Senior Vice President  
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