



Web 2.0 deserves Congress' support

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Remember back in the mid 1990s when everyone was talking about something called the "Information Superhighway"?

It was a vision of an imminent future where everyone had multimedia communications that combined TV, telephone and the computer to create a dazzling menu of interactive options.

Then after a few years all the talk about an Information Superhighway stopped, causing a lot of people to dismiss it as hype.

But the idea of the Information Superhighway was never abandoned. It's just that 10 years ago nobody could see what seems obvious now. The roadbed for the Information Superhighway has to be built with a massive investment in broadband Internet connections direct to consumers.

That investment is now underway. This year alone North American telecommunications companies will invest an estimated \$70 billion in expanding America's broadband infrastructure. Our investment is bolstered by those of many other ventures – including wireless, cable and municipal entities – that also are providing Internet service in today's competitive market.

More advanced online services, particularly those using video, require the delivery of far more data than relatively simple applications, like e-mail. Broadband essentially means a faster, far more sophisticated Internet that is capable of doing these more advanced tasks. Of course, this requires a great deal more capacity than the Internet of a decade ago. The YouTube video sharing site alone, for example, gobbles up more bandwidth than the entire Internet did at the turn of the century.

Even more important, continued expansion of broadband networks is necessary to accommodate the next wave of innovative services. This new generation is referred to as "Web 2.0."

That's not as catchy as "Information Superhighway," but Web 2.0 is a here and now reality that will fundamentally improve our quality of life and drive

job-creating economic growth in North Carolina and throughout the country. Web 2.0 will mean that patients in rural health clinics can be examined and evaluated by specialists at big teaching hospitals hundreds of miles away. A bright high school math student in the Blue Ridge could take a college course over a multimedia connection to Chapel Hill. Video conferencing could become an affordable option for average families everywhere. Applications like this and countless more are well within reach, as long as we continue our investment in broadband capacity. That investment is building on-ramps to the 21st Century version of the Information Superhighway. Government can help by adopting policies that continue to encourage vigorous investment in new broadband capacity that can be promptly deployed by the many players in the communications industry. I'm sure Congressman Heath Shuler understands the practical value of pro-broadband policies. He's already out there on the front lines supporting tax cuts for farmers and small business owners. More broadband will give these two groups affordable access to high-speed communications services that will help them compete with the big boys in global markets. Like Shuler, North State Communications has deep roots here and we want to see the people of North Carolina reap the full economic and social benefits of this next generation of Internet services. Toward that end, we would like to see government spend its energy encouraging extension of broadband to all citizens.

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