



Affordable, High-Speed Broadband Internet for Every New Yorker

New York State Farm Bureau Annual Meeting
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[As prepared for delivery]

Let me thank all of you for inviting me.

As I recall, the Farm Bureau's Annual Meeting was the very first place I came in December of 2004 after declaring my candidacy for Governor. It's an honor to return to discuss some of our accomplishments over the past year.

But I want to focus much of my remarks today on a policy we are implementing that is extremely innovative, and that holds great potential, not only to help our farmers compete but also to rebuild our Upstate economy and close the gap facing children and families in poverty—and that is universal access to high-speed, affordable broadband Internet in New York.

The Importance of Agriculture to Upstate's Economic Future

In every policy area, our first year has been defined by replacing stagnation with action. In areas where Albany stood still for so long—reforming government, rebuilding the Upstate economy, ensuring accountability in education, improving health care, lowering property taxes—we are now moving forward.

In no policy area has this been true more so than in agriculture.

With Pat leading the way, and with the advice and counsel of John Lincoln, Paul Zittel, and others, we have made some real progress this year.

- Last spring, when New York's dairy farmers were struggling because of rising costs and extremely low prices—threatening their very stability and threatening jobs—we stepped in and provided them with \$30 million in assistance. Most importantly, we acted quickly; 85 percent of farmers received the aid within two

weeks. We did this for a simple reason: because our Administration understands the importance of dairy to the economy of Upstate New York.

- We took a great idea that had been sidelined—a wholesalers' market in New York City to connect Upstate supply with Downstate demand—and we are now making it happen. We are planning to break ground for the Pride of New York Wholesalers' Market in Hunts Point in New York City next year.
- We established the Food Policy Council to coordinate our state's food policies in a comprehensive way. The Council will help ensure the availability of safe, fresh, nutritious and affordable food for all New Yorkers—especially low-income families, senior citizens and children—while expanding the consumer market for New York products, especially locally-grown and organically-grown food. Pat will be leading this effort, and we're proud to have Julie Suarez as a member of the Council as well.
- We have strengthened farmland protection. We increased funding for both the Environmental Protection Fund and the Farmland Protection Program, which are both critical tools for preserving farmland. In fact, later this month, we will announce the largest collection of projects in the history of the Farmland Protection Program.
- Importantly, we have also strengthened our advocacy in Washington. The renewal of the Farm Bill has been one of the top items on my federal agenda. I have sent several of our commissioners to meet with our delegation and to advocate for our priorities—whether they be on dairy policy, specialty crops, conservation programs, export and trade assistance, agricultural credit, research, nutrition and energy. They and I have continued to remind our leaders in Washington of the critical importance of renewing the farm bill this year.
- And finally, many of our broader reforms have had a real meaningful impact on our farms. For example, by reforming workers' comp, we have cut farms' workers' compensation costs for nearly every farm in New York—and for some, up to 24 percent.

What is the common thread that unifies all of these policies?

The answer is not only that agriculture matters to us. It's even more than that.

The answer is that we are looking to agriculture to be one of the main economic drivers behind the revitalization of the Upstate economy.

The problem has been that for too long the State saw agriculture as a dying industry. That has changed. Now, it is seen as an important strategic industry that is poised for tremendous growth. In our administration, agriculture is mentioned in the same breath as biotech, nanotech, advanced manufacturing, optics and aerospace.

Make no mistake about it: New York's farmers certainly face serious challenges—the rising cost of energy, property taxes, fuel and feed; the unpredictability of markets; development pressures; and even changing climactic patterns, which have manifested themselves recently in dramatic weather events.

The difference is that now, you have a state government that wants to be a strong and active partner in overcoming these challenges and helping you grow your business.

We will talk much more about new initiatives next month, when we do the State of the State and the budget. Today, I want to focus on one major infrastructure issue facing our farmers and facing all New Yorkers.

The Problem: A Growing Digital Divide

For farmers, and for all New Yorkers, infrastructure means something different than it once did. Fifty or seventy-five years ago, infrastructure meant access to a paved road, electricity or a phone line. Today, it means access to the information superhighway—and all of the economic opportunity that comes with it.

That's why I'm using this forum to announce the details of my historic plan for high-speed, affordable, universal broadband Internet in the State of New York.

The problem we face is that, in many ways, New York State has an inadequate infrastructure for the Information Age. Because of a lack of federal and state leadership, too many New Yorkers find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In fact, fewer than 25 percent of New Yorkers in rural areas have access to broadband Internet. Some may assume that because these areas are rural, they have natural and unavoidable disadvantages. But a rural landscape has not stopped Canada, a mostly rural country, from maintaining a broadband penetration rate of over 50 percent.

This problem does not only affect Upstate. Downstate doesn't fare much better. Nearly two-thirds of people living in New York City lack access to affordable, high-speed broadband. Some neighborhoods—like Sunset Park, Red Hook and Hunts Point—don't even have affordable access beyond a dial-up connection.

Let me make an important point: Our inadequate broadband infrastructure is not an abstract problem. It holds back our businesses, and our people, in real ways.

First, it hinders our businesses' ability to compete in the Innovation Economy. We live in a world where all Fortune 500 companies—and an increasing number of smaller businesses—have their employees, customers and suppliers connected through a 24-hour network. Businesses in New York that lack broadband access can neither build nor access these types of networks, and are therefore at a real disadvantage.

And second, a lack of broadband access widens the gap facing families and children in poverty. Consider that a child growing up in South Korea has Internet access that is ten times faster at half the price than a kid growing up in much of the Southern Tier or the South Bronx. In our cities, it is no coincidence that there is a correlation between poverty and being on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In sum, a lack of broadband access too often keeps both our businesses and our people, Upstate and Downstate, from competing in the twenty-first century economy. And that is simply unacceptable.

Our Solution: Universal, High-Speed, Affordable Broadband Access

Why do we find ourselves in this position today? Simply put, because of a lack of federal leadership. The United States is the only major industrialized country without a national broadband strategy.

So, in the absence of federal leadership, New York State must take action. We must close the digital divide by closing all gaps that remain throughout the State.

To do so, we are implementing a Universal Broadband Initiative to ensure that every New Yorker has access to affordable, high speed broadband Internet.

When we do this, no farmer, no business, no family and no child will find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide—because there will be no digital divide as we know it today.

We will begin by setting real goals.

One goal, of course, is to increase speed. The speed of a network is measured in megabits per second. Currently, the median download speed in the United States is 1.97 megabits per second, and in areas without broadband, it is often far less. Our goals are—by the year 2015—for every citizen of New York to have access to at least 20 megabits per second in each direction, and 100 megabits per second in major metropolitan areas.

There are other goals that we must set—for example, goals for broadband penetration and affordability. But the unfortunate fact is that we can't even set those goals yet because we know so little about the broadband landscape.

Our first action, therefore, will be to form the New York State Council for Universal Broadband, which will include key legislative leaders who have championed this idea; local government officials; and experts from academia. This Council will not just sit in a room and debate; it will break into teams, get on the ground and address this issue on every front.

For example, one problem we have is that we know very little about what our Internet infrastructure even looks like. Incredibly, in the Information Age, there is no map of

New York's broadband infrastructure—so we don't even know where the existing gaps are. A team from the Council will undertake that huge task. Only when we have this map can we understand where the gaps are and how they must be filled. Another action team will study innovative programs to increase the level of digital literacy in underserved urban and rural areas, because what good is high-speed Internet access if one doesn't know how to use a computer? A third team will determine how we will advance our vision for universal broadband coverage in collaboration with the academic, not-for-profit and private sectors—because collaboration will help us maximize our investment of state funds.

Our second action will be to immediately begin issuing grants to provide seed money for research, design and implementation of affordable broadband networks for underserved urban and rural communities. Together with the Legislature, we have provided \$5 million for this purpose, and we will build upon this financial commitment in the coming years.

One element of New York's strategy that is so innovative is that state government will not be the one constructing these networks. Instead, state money will be used to leverage matching funds from the private and not-for-profit sectors. In the end, it is New York's vibrant telecommunications sector—together with their tireless and invaluable workers—who will implement this vision in partnership with government. Furthermore, as part of this approach, our initiative will also advance the participation of minority- and women-owned businesses. New York is the first state to use this innovative public-private approach, and it will allow us to increase broadband access faster and cheaper as a result.

How will our state be changed when all New Yorkers have access to broadband?

Every business will have the tools they need to connect, in real time, with suppliers, customers and markets anywhere around the world, increasing their competitiveness.

Every child, every teacher, and every parent will have 24-hour access to all of the opportunity afforded by the Internet, including distance-learning capabilities.

Every person will have access to better preventive health care through telemedicine, one of the best ways to lower the cost of health care.

Every first responder and emergency worker will have the opportunity to build the robust and redundant communications infrastructure critical to effective emergency response.

Every citizen in our democracy will be connected to a wide range of government services and information, increasing both the efficiency and transparency of government.

And every city, county, town and village in New York will become more competitive in the race to attract investment and create jobs in the twenty-first century economy.

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Let me close with a final thought.

I believe that our vision for a Universal Broadband Initiative is in line with our state's tradition of leading the nation in implementing progressive policies to ensure economic opportunity for business and for people.

For example, many of us know that FDR was the president that established the Tennessee Valley Authority during the Great Depression, bringing electricity to impoverished rural areas in the South. He was hailed for this effort, which brought economic opportunity and hope—and literally light—to millions.

Many do not know, however, that in doing this, FDR was following a similar model he had established years earlier as Governor of New York—where, in 1931, he established the New York Power Authority and built the St. Lawrence Power Project to provide electricity for impoverished rural areas Upstate.

At the time, only one in ten farms in America had electricity. The provision of power to remote areas was not thought to be possible. But FDR led the way, and made it happen, here in New York. And the nation followed.

Today, high-speed, affordable broadband Internet is just as important to our economic future as electricity was then. And today, as we did then, New York is taking action.

In that spirit—and with the interests of our farms, the competitiveness of our economy, and the need to increase economic opportunity for all New Yorkers in mind—we are moving forward to close the broadband gap and put an end to our digital divide. It will not be easy, and it will not happen immediately, but it must be done, so let's work together to begin the task.

Thank you.