

March 3, 2016

Dear Presidential Debate Moderators,

The Internet provides indispensable economic opportunities for millions of Americans, helping them find a job, get an education, start a business, or participate in our democracy. In 21st century America, access to the Internet is not a luxury, but a necessity to live and excel.

However, according to the FCC's [most recent Broadband Progress Report](#), approximately 34 million Americans still lack access to truly high-speed Internet. And according to the [Pew Research Center](#), the percentage of adults with broadband at home has actually dropped in the last few years, declining from 70 percent to 67 percent. Home broadband adoption rates are particularly troubling among African Americans (54 percent), Latinos (50 percent), families earning under \$20,000 (41 percent), and rural residents (55 percent). The high price of broadband access is the most significant barrier to adoption.

This access and affordability gap has tremendous consequences. Nearly 5 million households with school-age children [lack high-speed Internet service](#). Broadband has become a necessity for students with seven out of ten teachers currently assigning homework that requires Internet access. Job seekers, too, struggle without Internet access. According to the FCC, [80 percent of Fortune 500 companies](#) only accept online applications. In both cases, low-income households, people of color, and rural Americans are disproportionately affected.

In an election that has so heavily focused on equality of opportunity, there has been no mention in the debates of Internet access as a driver for the American economy. For all of the talk of taxes, higher education, and healthcare, candidates and journalists have largely ignored a critical issue that would make it easier and more affordable for low-income families, communities of color, and rural Americans to find jobs, get an education, and increase the opportunities for their families and futures.

Access to broadband Internet is an important issue that Americans agree on, but it has been largely absent in both the campaigns and debates in the presidential race thus far. We, the undersigned groups, strongly encourage moderators to use upcoming debates as an opportunity to ask presidential candidates from both parties what they would do to ensure all Americans have meaningful and affordable access to high-speed Internet choices.

We propose the following question:

“High-speed Internet access is increasingly becoming necessary for Americans to fulfill basic needs and responsibilities. Students need broadband to do homework, and the Internet is a critical resource for those seeking to enter the workforce or engage in our democracy. However, despite broadband’s importance, more than 34 million Americans still lack access to modern high-speed service, and nearly a third of the country does not have high-speed broadband connections to their homes. Incredibly, nearly 60 percent of families earning less than \$20,000 per year lack home access. If you are elected president, what will you do to ensure that all Americans have affordable access to this vital tool?”

A solution is needed, and the public agrees. Recent polling shows that a majority of Americans – 64 percent – feel that expanding Internet access should be a [priority for the next president](#). A majority also

agree that the benefits of improving Internet access to help improve children's education outweighs the potential costs to taxpayers.

American voters deserve to know where these candidates stand on this issue, one which will have enormous consequences on the economic and educational opportunities not only for this generation, but for future ones as well.

We look forward to a productive discussion, and hope that you will consider challenging the candidates to make their stances clear on this issue.

Respectfully,

18MillionRising.org

Access Humboldt

American Indian Policy Institute

American Library Association

Benton Foundation

California Telehealth Network

Center for Media Justice

Color of Change

Common Cause

Common Sense Kids Action

Communications Workers of America

Daily Kos

Demand Progress

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Engine

EveryLibrary.org

Fight for the Future

Free Press

Future of Music Coalition

Greenlining Institute

Harry Potter Alliance

Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Just Foreign Policy

Media Alliance

NAACP

National Council of La Raza

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

National Hispanic Media Coalition

Native Public Media

New America's Open Technology Institute

Next Century Cities

Open MIC (Open Media and Information Companies Initiative)

OpenMedia

Popular Resistance

Public Knowledge

Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition

The Media Consortium

United Church of Christ, OC Inc.