

Resolution to Advance Digital Equal Opportunity

Sponsored by the Florida State Conference (adopted by unanimous vote, Business Meeting of Branches, September 18, 2009, Miami, FL; adopted by unanimous vote by the National Board of Directors, October 12, 2009)

WHEREAS, the 21st century marks the dawn of the digital age, and for generations to come the integration of broadband and digital implements and applications into our daily lives will be essential to our survival and our ability to succeed as a people; and

WHEREAS, the media, telecommunications, internet and broadband industries comprise one sixth of the American economy, constitute America's greatest export, define and drive America's cultural and political life, and are indispensable to the achievement of all of the NAACP's civil rights objectives; and

WHEREAS, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as the preeminent civil rights organization focused on ensuring the political, educational, social and economic equality of all persons, believes that universal broadband adoption is the key to first class citizenship in the digital age; and

WHEREAS, the Pew Internet and American Life Project has found that in 2009, only 46% of African Americans are connected to broadband at home, compared to 65% of white Americans, reflecting a substantial digital divide in the availability of the technologies that are necessary for first class citizenship in the digital age; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP recognizes that without access to broadband and essential technological tools and applications, at home, school, and in the workplace, people will be relegated to lives of separate and unequal status as compared to those with access to advanced communication technologies; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP believes that no person should suffer a disparate impact from lack of access to, or productive use of, high speed internet access because of their geography, social-economic status, race or ethnicity, language, or physical or mental ability; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP recognizes that broadband provides a vital engine of opportunity that can be leveraged to empower those who suffer socio-economic disadvantages caused by disparities in education, job training, access to credit and financial services, and availability and provision of healthcare services; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP believes that we can avoid yet another generation of second-class citizenship by imparting digital citizenship amongst all our people so that we can better educate future generations

and close the achievement gap, make healthcare more accessible and affordable for the millions of Americans who lack access to essential medical services, provide new job opportunities for those who previously could not hope for equal opportunities in the workplace, and ensure full voting rights and civic participation; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP applauds the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (“ARRA”), particularly the portions of that act pertaining to broadband deployment and adoption, as a first step to providing an opportunity to level the playing field for communities of color whose ability to experience socio-economic advancement have been hindered by the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow; and

WHEREAS, although in the ARRA Congress provided for substantial participation of socially and economically disadvantaged businesses (“SDBs”) in broadband deployment, it is doubtful SDBs, and particularly minority business enterprises (“MBEs”) will participate substantially in broadband deployment unless the NAACP maintains vigilance in its oversight of ARRA administration; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP believes that all people must have access to advanced communications technologies, and that to these ends, whether by legislation or executive order, Congress and the President of the United States should ensure that all people have access to broadband high-speed internet, particularly low-income people living in public housing who are ordinarily not afforded the opportunity to take advantage of these essential tools of digital citizenship; and

WHEREAS, to promote broadband adoption, literacy and MBE participation, on July 20, 2009 the Broadband Opportunity Coalition (“BBOC”), was formed by the National Urban League, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Council of La Raza, Asian American Justice Center and One Economy Corp., with the assistance of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council; and

WHEREAS, the BBOC has invited the NAACP, at no cost to the NAACP, to become a Founding Member of the BBOC with a standing seat as a member of the BBOC Board of Directors;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NAACP supports the use of economic stimulus dollars to promote universal broadband and advanced communication technology to communities lacking competitive and affordable access to high-speed broadband connections to the internet, as a means of promoting digital equal opportunity and that, in administering these funds, the Department of Commerce and Department of Agriculture must eliminate entry barriers to MBE participation in the broadband stimulus; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NAACP will champion community-based programs and partnerships between local governments and private enterprises which will spur the adoption and use of broadband and advanced communications technologies by members of underserved populations who presently have access to high-speed broadband data connections but lack computer access, digital literacy and training, and/or culturally relevant public purpose content focused on digital applications that improve their lives; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in order to provide all people with access to technology, regardless of location or income, the NAACP encourages Congress to enact legislation, or the President to decree by executive order, that broadband Internet access to low-income households, particularly including public housing facilities, is an essential infrastructure item akin to the provision of gas, water or electricity; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in developing the National Broadband Plan requested by Congress, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should (1) declare universal broadband adoption to be the highest priority of the National Broadband Plan; (2) recommend that affordable broadband service should be universally available to all Americans, including those in low income and rural communities; (3) ensure that broadband regulations are supported by documentation that they will not depress adoption or increase costs to minority, multilingual, tribal and low income populations; and (4) define “underserved” and “unserved” so that in each category the top priorities for deployment and adoption are communities whose poverty is entrenched and cross-generational because it is tied to race, language or tribal origin; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to carry out this Resolution, the NAACP National Board of Directors will establish a standing Committee on Media, Telecommunications and Broadband Policy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NAACP accepts the invitation of the Broadband Opportunity Coalition (BBOC) to become a full voting member of the BBOC with a standing seat on its Board of Directors; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the NAACP send a copy of this resolution to the President of the United States, members of Congress, members of the Federal Communications Commission, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Agriculture, and state legislatures and regulatory agencies.