

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001
907-465-3500
fax: 907-465-3532



550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1700
Anchorage, AK 99501
907-269-7450
fax 907-269-7461
www.Gov.Alaska.Gov
Governor@Alaska.Gov

Governor Bill Walker
STATE OF ALASKA

June 20, 2018

The Honorable Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Senate
1500 West Benson Boulevard
Anchorage, AK 99503

Re: Net Neutrality

Dear Senator Wielechowski:

In your letter dated February 20, 2018, you asked me to issue an Executive Order on net neutrality. Like you, I have been concerned with the actions taken by the Federal Communication Commission regarding the repeal of net neutrality. However, after looking at the legal hurdles the State faces by being in conflict with a program that very likely federally preempts states' laws, and considering circumstances that already exist within Alaska, I am taking some alternative steps to address this issue.

I wholeheartedly agree with you that Alaskans need meaningful Internet access. Due to Alaska's vast geographic size, residents of our state rely on the Internet for many services. Broadband internet can be a lifeline for many of our residents who live in remote areas removed from any law enforcement presence and who depend on services provided by health professionals hundreds of miles away. Not only do Alaska residents rely on the Internet to communicate with family and friends, but they also rely on the Internet for education, to access health and safety resources, and to otherwise connect with the outside world. I appreciate that in May, Alaska's independent telecom companies worked together to agree to not block websites; not censor content; and not throttle, discriminate, or degrade network performance based on content—core tenants of net neutrality.

Separately, I am working to address serious broadband gaps facing Alaskans. In February, following a presentation to the National Governors Association meeting, I spoke with Brad Smith, President and Chief Legal Officer of Microsoft specifically about our need for broadband in Alaska, especially in rural Alaska. Following that discussion, on April 3, 2018, I penned a letter to President Smith asking Microsoft to consider Alaska as part of its Rural Airband Initiative. That initiative focuses on connecting rural America in 12 states by 2022. I have offered that if Microsoft can solve connectivity challenges in Alaska, where we have immense geographic distances, remote and isolated communities off the road system, and extreme climate conditions, then Microsoft could solve other connectivity challenges in other parts of the United States.

In May, the State of Alaska announced an exciting new partnership with Education SuperHighway, a non-profit organization committed to helping states expand broadband opportunities, ensuring

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more connectivity for all Alaska schools. This organization is already working with 24 other states to provide advocacy and consultation services to states and school districts in order to connect American public school classrooms to high speed Internet.

Internet access is as essential as the many utility services we take for granted, such as sewer, water, and electricity. I want to be innovative in finding solutions, but I also want to be careful not to hinder important work already being done to connect rural communities throughout the state. Thus, while not offering an Executive Order as requested, I am committed to continuing to search for new solutions to broadband challenges at the state level, and look forward to continuing to discuss alternative ways of getting there. I think we both want the same goal: for Alaskans to be better connected, for a free and open Internet to protect consumers, and to provide Internet access equitably across our vast state.

Thank you for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Sincerely,



Bill Walker
Governor

cc: The Honorable Tom Begich, Senator, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Berta Gardner, Senator, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Gary Stevens, Senator, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Dennis Egan, Senator, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Donny Olson, Senator, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Bryce Edgmon, Speaker of the House, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Matt Claman, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Harriet Drummond, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Les Gara, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable David Guttenberg, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Andy Josephson, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Scott Kawasaki, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Sam Kito, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Gabrielle LeDoux, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable John Lincoln, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Dan Ortiz, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Justin Parish, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Paul Seaton, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Ivy Sponholz, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Geran Tarr, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Chris Tuck, Representative, Alaska State Legislature
The Honorable Adam Wool, Representative, Alaska State Legislature