



OPINION: U.S. MUST STAY COMPETITIVE IN TODAY'S DIGITAL WORLD - INSIDE SOURCES

Posted on December 3, 2022 by Steve Buccì | Inside Sources



America is one of the most connected nations on Earth. The breadth of our digital usage footprint is massive. It is one of the things that makes us a world leader in commerce, defense, science and entertainment. It also makes us vulnerable. Despite that, no one wants the United States to move backward.

A critical debate is how we stay in the lead of the race to use today's — and, more important, tomorrow's — digital technology effectively. America's future ability to compete with China (our biggest tech competitor) and maintain its role as a global leader in technology relies on the widest possible spread of top-quality broadband connectivity.

Broadband connectivity is the engine of the 21st-century digital economy. China is using all the levers of state power to lead the world in every aspect of 5G, including networks, chipsets and industry standards. America must stay engaged and innovative if we are to compete effectively with China and other growing digital competitors. There is a foundational challenge at the root of this competition.

A connected nation is integral to maintaining our position as a global power, perhaps the most fundamental part. A key is recognizing that we're only as good as our weakest links. We need to make sure that all Americans are connected. If all citizens aren't connected, America can't fully embrace the digital age we're entering. This lesson was learned during the COVID crisis, in education, and in business.

U.S. broadband connectivity is no longer a luxury— it's a necessity. Improving Americans' access to stable and affordable internet has the power to maintain our status as a tech leader and elevate it. [Past administrations, with bipartisan congressional support, have spurred IT and digital innovation, enabling the United States to rise as the global leader in information technology.](#) Significant support for technological innovation has had a positive effect on job creation and maintenance, as well as the broader U.S. economy.

While the United States still holds a leading role in tech innovation on a global scale, this lead is threatened by China's aggressive pursuit of global tech leadership. There is clearly a lot of work to stay ahead of China.

The Affordable Connectivity Program will play an essential role in the future of U.S. competitiveness. The ACP was created and funded by Congress in the infrastructure bill and implemented by the Federal Communications Commission to assist qualifying low-income households struggling to pay for and access the internet with a \$30 monthly broadband subsidy.

For every dollar we invest in helping Americans connect to broadband, we drive an enormous amount of downstream economic benefits,

productivity, jobs and innovation. The number of enrollees has illustrated the need for this program; 15 million American households have signed up for the ACP and demand is still rising.



The problem is that funding will run out soon if Congress doesn't act. Data analysis [shows](#) the program will be depleted by mid-2024. We can't connect all these people and then hang them out to dry without practical means to maintain this capability. Congress and the FCC should work together and figure out the best solutions to fund ACP, short- and long-term. Unlike many of the government relief programs of the last two years, the ACP is worth maintaining.

Keeping Americans connected will keep the United States as a world leader. This is a way to make this more than a briefing note or a slogan. If Congress doesn't act to extend the ACP — millions of people will be left behind — and we risk falling further behind China. Fully funding the ACP can make a difference in helping individual Americans, families, businesses and the broader national interests. The cause deserves bipartisan support.