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Our View: Strickland plugs Ohio into the future with new broadband development

If Ohio intends to rebuild its economic muscle power in the 21st century, it needs to build up its access to high-speed Internet service throughout the state.

Such access will open the door for residents and businesses to take advantage of the full range of possibilities the Internet holds for commerce, communication, education, employment, entrepreneurship and more.

Bringing broadband, that is, high-speed, Internet service to those areas of Ohio where it is lacking is the goal of a welcome new effort announced yesterday by Gov. Ted Strickland and called the Connect Ohio Initiative.

This non-profit program will create a partnership between the state and broadband service providers to identify areas that need service and then tailor individualized programs to get communities Internet service and computer access. Plans call for the state to back this effort with \$7 million over the next four years.

Connect Ohio Initiatives, LLC, is a subsidiary of Connected Nation, a national group that grew out of efforts to expand broadband service in Kentucky. That state has seen broadband grow from 22 percent of the population subscribing to 44 percent over the past three years. Broadband service is available to 95 percent of Kentucky's households now, according to a recent story in the Wall Street Journal's online edition. The story noted that Tennessee and West Virginia are undertaking similar efforts.

Closing the gaps in broadband service is a national concern. The U.S. is falling far behind other developed countries in broadband availability.

It may surprise you to learn that the United States ranked a mere 10th in a 30-nation survey of broadband subscription rates in 2005. Worse, we then fell to 15th place in 2006, according to the Wall Street Journal. The U.S. has 19.6 broadband subscribers per 100 inhabitants, while top-ranked Denmark has 31.9. Even Korea outdoes the U.S., ranking fourth with 29.1.

With other nations outdistancing ours, and neighboring states beefing up their broadband capability, the Connect Ohio Initiative is a timely and much-needed step toward Ohio holding its economic place and then advancing into the future.

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