

2019 POLICIES

Telecom

Incorporating the next generation of entrepreneurs, technological innovation and automation, and workplace rules, conditions, and norms bring enormous possibility and challenges to the business community, particularly with respect to decisions about where to locate a business, how to attract and retain workers, and ways to compete in a global economy. In our rapidly changing 21st century, Internet access has become essential for commerce. The proliferation of the Internet of Things (IoT) network and the application of the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) in our manufacturing sector will continue to have major systemic implications across industries and regulatory structures as well.

A vibrant local and globally competitive economy depends on digital commerce and requires robust, modern, secure, and accessible communications, data, and information infrastructure, systems, and networks. Direct investments relative to physical infrastructure and deployment (e.g. Border to Border Broadband Development Grant Program) as well as decisions about the regulatory framework within the digital ecosystem itself (e.g. "net neutrality," Internet privacy, consumer protections etc.) impact Minnesota businesses - both as suppliers and as purchasers of goods and services.

OUR KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2019 SESSION INCLUDE:

- Support a careful, consistent, and comprehensive federal approach to Internet regulation.
- Continue improving Internet service across the state.
- Recognize that Minnesotans already have Internet privacy protections.

Minnesota's telecommunications providers have invested billions of dollars to build out Minnesota's infrastructure, increasing access, speed, and availability of this asset. But there are places in Greater Minnesota still lacking a reliable, fast internet connection. These places tend to be in areas where geography, population density, or other issues make the business case for deployment economically challenging.

"Telecommunications policy" is predominantly a federal issue and federal policymakers should set the appropriate regulatory structure to ensure an open Internet. Protecting individuals' Internet privacy is important to everyone engaged in the telecommunications industry and at the core of every consumer relationship. Existing state and federal Internet privacy statutes, regulatory provisions, and robust oversight protect Minnesotans today and should be equally applied throughout the Internet ecosystem.

OUR GOALS

Economic growth ultimately comes from a business climate that fosters risk-taking, innovation, investment, and production. We support making strategic investments that facilitate economic growth and change and removing and/or lowering uncompetitive regulatory burdens that create roadblocks to risk-taking, innovation and investment (See 2019 Economic Development Policy).

Efforts to modernize or update Minnesota's physical infrastructure and deployment or telecommunication goals should be based on realistic, cost-effective, and technology-neutral metrics. As modernization efforts develop nationally, the state of Minnesota should seek to take advantage of opportunities for federal investment to ensure that Minnesota programs are not duplicative. The Chamber does not support picking winners and losers in the marketplace or policies that unintentionally create artificial barriers for emerging technologies.

The Chamber also recognizes that a digitally-reliant economy presents serious cybersecurity concerns that will have major implications for Minnesota businesses. This factor should be carefully considered by policymakers.

As federal action sets the stage for any regulation of the Internet itself, the federal framework will determine where state policy is needed to implement its intent. State policy must stay within the federal framework to ensure a national system and avoid a patchwork of laws among the states. Within the digital ecosystem itself, Minnesota should continue to pursue a “light touch” regulatory approach and defer to federal policymakers on efforts to regulate the Internet. Minnesota’s businesses rely on dependable, efficient, and sustainable Internet access to succeed in the digital, gig, and sharing economies.

CONTINUE IMPROVING INTERNET SERVICE ACROSS THE STATE

We support continued funding of the state’s Border to Border Broadband Development Grant Program to bring technologically-neutral broadband to locations in Minnesota that lack a broadband connection. It’s important that the program not overlap with federal broadband grant programs. We encourage policymakers to recognize that modern technology – such as delivering internet via satellite or fixed wireless – may make fiber broadband unnecessary for delivering internet to some residences.

RECOGNIZE THAT MINNESOTANS ALREADY HAVE INTERNET PRIVACY PROTECTIONS

Under current law and through the existing regulatory regime, Minnesotans’ privacy protections include the following: a) Internet Service Providers (ISPs) must have customer permission to divulge personal information, including consumer identity, web browsing activity, and stored computer data information; b) the Minnesota attorney general has the authority to enforce Minnesota’s privacy statute; and c) Minnesotans have the right to sue their ISP for violating their privacy.

Telecommunications service providers and ISPs are required to protect their customers’ personal information and get their permission before using personal information for any purpose other than delivering telecommunications service, protecting the property of the service provider, protecting individuals from fraud, or providing 911 service. We support efforts under way to develop consistent federal policy on Internet privacy. ■