

ARTICLE

A Transformational Moment

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The demographic landscape of America is dramatically changing. Latinos are both the face and the living proof of that change. In recent years, Latinos' prominence in both influence and population has grown drastically. The trend is sweeping across the U.S., no longer limited to border states like Texas and California.

Technology, too, is shifting in an equally dramatic measure. Just two years ago, consumers met the iPad and in many ways it—and other mobile devices like it—have revolutionized the way we communicate, educate and do business. We are in the midst of an evolving and fast-paced technological landscape, and this evolution is almost certain to continue into the foreseeable future. As a former Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)—the first Latino appointed to serve on the FCC—I know how important it is to ensure this country creates a business and regulatory climate that fosters continued technological progress, infrastructure investment and business development that enables companies to do what they do best—grow, innovate and create jobs.

It used to be that wireless broadband was a luxury; more and more, it's a necessity. A study released by The Hispanic Institute on May 17, 2011 states that Latinos are leading the charge in the use of mobile devices to access the Internet at 53 percent. In the Latino community, our increasing reliance on wireless devices makes access to high-speed wireless service more crucial than ever. What's left of the digital divide, which still exists, can and must be bridged. I firmly believe the great hope to build that bridge lies in wireless broadband if we handle this transformational moment appropriately. Broadband is not only a connector in human and business terms; the FCC's National Broadband Plan recognizes that broadband is an

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economic driver.

Ralph de la Vega, AT&T Mobility CEO and AT&T's highest ranking Latino, agrees: "Mobile broadband has become the critical technology driving growth and innovation," he said.

The FCC also agrees. In its National Broadband Plan, the FCC makes recommendations to ensure that America will leverage broadband, including wireless broadband, to create jobs, stimulate the economy and close the digital divide. Closing the digital divide is important to our long-term sustained economic recovery because leaving minority communities behind will only increase the disparity between America's haves and have-nots and do greater harm to our economy. That's a big reason why I see the proposed merger of AT&T and T-Mobile as a pivotal, transformational moment. This merger will deliver next-generation 4G LTE wireless access to 55 million more Americans. Communities with high-density Latino populations that currently have faulty or non-existent wireless coverage, such as that found on the Texas-Mexico border, will go from no 4G high-speed access to blanket coverage.

The expanded reach of high-speed wireless into traditionally underserved communities will make President Barack Obama's vision to "connect every part of America to the digital age" as part of The National Broadband Plan more than mere political rhetoric, but a tangible reality for 97 percent of the U.S. population. And with AT&T committed and able to invest billions for the build out of its new network upon FCC approval of the merger, not only will the President's goal be realized, but it will be done in a cost and time efficient manner. This expanded reach of wireless broadband, delivered by the combined AT&T/T-Mobile networks, represents a historic opportunity for Latino consumers and businesses alike.

The deployment of wireless broadband is a catalyst for small businesses and minority entrepreneurship, and the merger represents a significant opportunity for growth in both of these segments. AT&T's commitment to closing coverage gaps and ensuring continued affordability of its services to all communities, including Latinos, is noteworthy as is its commitment to cultivating the next generation of technology leaders and supply chain business owners.

AT&T has an outstanding record of creating more opportunity for women and minority-owned businesses, and committing considerable resources to educating our next generation. In fact, AT&T was recognized by the National Minority Supplier Development Council in 2010 as the Corporation of the Year, a nod to both AT&T's substantial commitment of time and professional resources to minority business owners and its efforts to contract with Latino and other minority businesses across its supply chain. The Latino community has every reason, therefore, to expect the merged company to continue this mutually beneficial partnership.

Like all mergers, the merger of AT&T and T-Mobile, as required by law, is subject to a number of federal and regulatory approvals, but it's my hope that those hurdles are cleared swiftly and without impediment so that all Americans and the Latino community, in particular, can make headway in closing the digital divide, growing our economy, and taking advantage of all of the benefits that advanced wireless broadband access has to offer.