

Appalachian governor wants high speed Internet extended statewide

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio's Appalachian governor has ordered that broadband Internet access be made available to every county in the state.

In an executive order signed Friday, Strickland directed the Ohio Broadband Council to coordinate an effort that will extend broadband access to all 88 counties and allow public and private entities to tap into the network.

"Ohio's economic future relies on our ability to compete in a high-speed, high-tech global marketplace," Strickland said in a statement. "The Ohio Broadband Council will partner with the public and private sectors to help make sure that every Ohioan has viable access to affordable, high-speed internet service, regardless of where they live, work or learn."

Internet access in Ohio's Appalachian region has been particularly slow to arrive.

Strickland's order also requires state agencies to use the Broadband Ohio Network rather than the disparate public and private networks agencies currently in use, which he said will save money and be more efficient.

The effort to expand broadband access is aimed specifically at regions of the state such as Appalachia, where the economy and education levels have fallen behind, the coal industry has faltered and manufacturing jobs have moved abroad. Some schools face a technology gap in a largely rural, mountainous region where high-speed Internet is spotty.

The rates of college attendance for Appalachian Ohio high school graduates has been estimated at 30 percent, less than half the national average, and the percentage of Appalachian Ohio adults with four-year college degrees is about 12 percent, half the national average.

Strickland, who hails from Appalachian Ohio, hopes the expansion of broadband access will help places like Appalachia latch on to the knowledge-based economy.

The Gov.'s Office of Appalachia announced earlier this month that it was partnering with Ohio State University to bring broadband access to community-owned wireless networks in several Appalachian counties, and up to three communities will receive a community learning center with computers for public use at no charge.

On the Net:

Ohio Gov.'s Office: <http://www.governor.ohio.gov>

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