

Obama promotes plan for near universal wireless

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President Barack Obama is greeted on the tarmac upon his arrival at Sawyer International Airport in Gwinn, Mich., Thursday, Feb. 10, 2011. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

(AP) -- Saying tomorrow's economy can't thrive on yesterday's infrastructure, President Barack Obama on Thursday promoted his five-year plan to lure new industries and jobs to the U.S. by expanding high-speed wireless to 98 percent of the country.

"It's just like that movie, 'Field of Dreams:' If we build it, they will come," Obama said in this snowy, Upper Michigan university town where many small businesses owe their success to [high-speed Internet access](#).

"For our families and businesses, high-speed wireless is the next train

station, the next off-ramp, Obama said. "It's how we'll spark new innovation, new [investments](#) and new jobs," he said at Northern Michigan University, a wired campus where the students telecommute.

Obama's goal is lofty considering that such technology is only now being built in major cities by AT&T, Verizon and other companies. It also will cost billions of dollars that Republicans are unlikely to want to spend.

Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he wanted to review whether some \$7 billion in stimulus money already dedicated to Internet broadband is having an effect "before we target any more of our scarce taxpayer dollars." His committee is holding hearings on the issue.

Obama spoke Thursday as unrest continued in Egypt amid reports that longtime authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak was about to give in to the demands of protesters and bring his 30-year reign to an end. Obama addressed the situation briefly at the top of his remarks, saying history was unfolding in Egypt and that the United States continues to support an orderly transition to democracy there.

Obama's wireless plan involves nearly doubling the space available on the airwaves for wireless high-speed Internet traffic to keep up with ever-growing demand. This would be accomplished in part by auctioning off space on the radio spectrum to commercial wireless carriers. The White House says this would raise nearly \$30 billion over 10 years, and the money could be spent on initiatives that include \$10 billion to develop a national broadband network for public safety agencies and \$5 billion for infrastructure to help rural areas access high-speed [wireless](#). Additional money could be used to reduce the deficit, the White House says.

It's all conditioned on congressional approval, and the proposals may get cold-shouldered by the Republicans who now control the House and

have made clear they want to decrease spending in most areas, not go along with the targeted increases in areas like [infrastructure](#), education and [innovation](#) that the president is pursuing as a pathway to jobs and "winning the future" - the newest White House mantra.

Portions of the plan will be included in the 2012 budget proposal Obama is set to release Monday.

At the university, Obama saw a demonstration of the "wimax" technology that lets the school connect with classrooms elsewhere. He addressed a chemistry class at a high school 20 miles away after students popped up on big video screens near the president and waved at him.

"It's like 'Star Trek,'" Obama said. "I'm being beamed!"

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