

Obama unveils high-speed Internet help for low-income homes

July 15 2015, by Darlene Superville



President Barack Obama speaks in the Choctaw Nation on economic opportunities for underprivileged communities across the nation, on Wednesday, July 15, 2015, in Durant, Okla. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

Calling the Internet a 21st century necessity, President Barack Obama on Wednesday unveiled a program to bring faster Internet connections to more low-income households, particularly to help students living in public and assisted housing stay ahead in school.

Under ConnectHome, the public, private and nonprofit sectors have pledged to work together to provide high-speed connections and digital devices to more families at lower cost.

More than 90 percent of households headed by a college graduate have Internet access, Obama said. But fewer than half of low-income households have similar access.

In this day and age, Obama said the "digital divide" puts these individuals at a disadvantage by limiting their educational and economic opportunities because the Internet is increasingly needed to find a job, finish homework or keep in touch with family and friends.

"In this digital age, when you can apply for a job, take a course, pay your bills ... with a tap of your phone, the Internet is not a luxury. It's a necessity," Obama said in Durant, Oklahoma, on the first day of a two-day visit to the state.

"You cannot connect with today's economy without having access to the Internet," he said.

ConnectHome is similar to ConnectEd, a federal program that Obama said is on track to wire 99 percent of K-12 classrooms and libraries with high-speed Internet by the end of 2017.



President Barack Obama arrives to speak in the Choctaw Nation on economic opportunities for underprivileged communities across the nation, on Wednesday, July 15, 2015, in Durant, Okla. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

ConnectHome will begin in 27 cities and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which is headquartered in Durant. With about 200,000 members spread across much of southeastern Oklahoma, the Choctaw Nation is the nation's third-largest Native American tribe.

The Choctaw Nation was also among the administration's first "Promise Zones," a designation that makes it eligible for tax incentives and grants to help fight poverty.

The only federal money expected to be spent on ConnectHome is a \$50,000 Agriculture Department grant to the Choctaw Nation, officials said.



Spectators watch as President Barack Obama arrives to speak in the Choctaw Nation on economic opportunities for underprivileged communities across the nation, on Wednesday, July 15, 2015, in Durant, Okla. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

The 27 cities the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development selected for ConnectHome are: Albany, Georgia; Atlanta; Baltimore; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Boston; Camden, New Jersey; Cleveland; Denver; Durham, North Carolina; Fresno, California; Kansas City, Missouri; Little Rock, Arkansas; Los Angeles; Macon, Georgia; Memphis, Tennessee; Meriden, Connecticut; Nashville, Tennessee; New Orleans; New York; Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia; Rockford, Illinois; San Antonio; Seattle; Springfield, Massachusetts; Tampa, Florida; and the District of Columbia.

Obama was spending the night in Oklahoma and on Thursday continuing

a weeklong focus on making the criminal justice system fairer.

He planned to meet Thursday with law enforcement officials and inmates during a historic tour of the El Reno Federal Correctional Institution, a medium-security facility west of Oklahoma City that holds about 1,300 male offenders. "I will be the first sitting president to visit a federal prison," Obama said in a speech Tuesday to the NAACP meeting in Philadelphia.

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