with transparent decisionmaking processes that are open to all interested parties.

E. Ensuring Universal Service

The goal of providing access and affordable service to all members of society is fundamental to the development of the GII. The definition of universal service, however, necessarily varies from country to country—ranging from the provision of high quality telephone service to every home and business in most industrialized countries to access to a public telephone in many developing countries.

The ability to provide universal service on a national basis depends upon a number of factors, including the level of infrastructure development, the reach and technological capabilities of national networks, and the cost of access to the network and services. Other factors to be considered include the availability and use of advanced methods of network planning and maintenance, and explicit performance and service quality goals.

and service quality goals. The definition of universal service is also being expanded by the advent of digital technologies. In many countries, including the United States, policymakers face increasing pressure to expand universal service beyond "plain old telephone service" to include a broader array of new telecommunications and information services. In fact, universal service has always been an evolutionary concept, expanding as the capabilities of the network and the types of service demanded by the great majority of users have increased. For example, in the United States fifty years ago, a party-line was deemed sufficient for universal service purposes; now an individual line for each subscriber is generally

911 emergency service.

In both developed and less developed countries, wireless technologies can help meet the needs for both basic and more advanced services. For example, by augmenting terrestrial-based facilities with satellite facilities and services, national networks can maximize their potential. The point-to-multipoint and mobile communications capabilities of satellites, which are global in reach, permit the extension of services to even the most remote regions.

viewed as a component of universal

service, together with such features as

direct dialing for long distance calls and

Moreover, in helping meet universal service goals, one option for governments to consider is the establishment of community "access points." For example, institutions such

as schools, libraries, or hospitals could be equipped with basic and advanced information and communications technologies for use by members of the public. Such community access points would facilitate the efficient provision of broader public access to a core set of services.

Although several countries have raised concerns that competition diverts revenues from the public operator and undermines its ability to provide universal service, experience shows that access to the telephone has been improved in the most liberal national markets. In the United Kingdom, for example, many customers are ordering a telephone for the first time largely because increased competition—cable television companies are now offering telephone service—has made it more affordable. In the United States, concerns were raised a decade ago that increased competition in the provision of long distance services, which had traditionally subsidized basic local rates, would threaten universal service. These concerns abated as competition spurred innovation and price reductions, which in turn have expanded universal service. Further, studies by the OECD indicate that telephone penetration has not been eroded in any member country that has introduced infrastructure competition. The OECD concluded, "Universal service has not been impaired by market liberalization; (rather) facilities competition can be applied to complement and enhance universal service." 5 Indeed, many now argue that full and open facilities-based competition, by reducing prices, is the most effective way to promote universal

As together we strive to expand the worldwide telecommunications infrastructure and build the GII, we must all keep the goal of universal service constantly in mind. With significant decreases in the costs of information transmission and processing, the creation of the Information Society has the potential to improve the quality of life of all citizens. Recognizing that information leads to empowerment, the nations of the world must work together to ensure that as many citizens as possible in all societies have access to the resources of the Information Age.

Recommended Action

Although the provision of universal service varies from country to country, the goal of providing all people with greater access to both basic and advanced services is a crucial element of the GII. The United States will join with other governments to:

- Consider, at the local and national levels, the benefits afforded by the introduction of competition and private investment in meeting and expanding universal service:
- Exchange information at the bilateral and multilateral level to address the range of available options to meet universal service goals; and
- Consider, at the national and international levels, ways to promote universal access as a means of providing service to currently underserved and geographically remote areas.

III. Encouraging the Use of the GII

While we believe that the adoption, application, and advancement of the five core principles are necessary to create an environment in which the GII can realize its full potential, such actions alone are insufficient to guarantee it. Regardless of the sophistication of the technology or services being offered, users must be assured that they can allow the GII entry into their homes, offices, and lives to access and share information safely and without forfeiting any of their rights. Governments, companies, and publicinterest groups, by working together on information policy and content issues. must address these concerns.

An equally important task for governments and private sectors is to demonstrate the potential benefits of the GII to citizens. It is only when people see tangible results of applications that they will begin to appreciate how it can be used to improve their lives. This appreciation is the key to stimulating demand for the services and content of the GII, which in turn will provide the impetus to remove institutional and regulatory barriers to its full utilization.

A. Information Policy and Content Issues

Developing an effective information policy will provide governments with perhaps their greatest challenge. The central objectives of information policy include ensuring that: (1) The privacy of individuals and organizations using the GII is protected; (2) the security and reliability of the networks and the information that passes over them are preserved; and (3) the intellectual property rights of those who create the information, education, and entertainment content are protected. To assure the growth of an information infrastructure accessible and accountable to the citizens of the world, governments must develop and implement these objectives in close

⁵ Ibid, p.3.