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# Obama Unveils Wireless Expansion Plan

By **SHERYL GAY STOLBERG**

MARQUETTE, Mich. — Declaring that “we can’t expect tomorrow’s economy to take root using yesterday’s infrastructure,” [President Obama](#) traveled to this snowbound town in a remote corner of Michigan on Thursday to make the case that expanding wireless access is critical to the nation’s economic recovery.

“This isn’t just about a faster Internet or being able to find a friend on [Facebook](#),” Mr. Obama said in a speech at Northern Michigan University here, after viewing a demonstration on long-distance learning over the Internet.

“It’s about connecting every corner of America to the digital age,” the president said. “It’s about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers can monitor weather across the state and markets across the globe. It’s about an entrepreneur on Main Street with a great idea she hopes to sell to the big city. It’s about every young person who no longer has to leave his hometown to seek new opportunity — because opportunity is right there at his or her fingertips.”

In his [State of the Union address](#) last month, Mr. Obama called for securing high-speed wireless coverage to 98 percent of all Americans within five years. On Thursday, the White House released details of how he would spend billions of dollars for the plan, which also includes a high-tech wireless public safety system that would tie cities and towns together in the event of a national emergency like the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Under Mr. Obama’s proposal, which the White House maintains would also raise enough revenue to cut the deficit by \$9.6 billion over the next decade, the government would nearly double the wireless spectrum available for mobile broadband. That would be achieved in part through “voluntary incentive auctions” in which broadcasters, who license the spectrum through the [Federal Communications Commission](#), would release some of it back to the government, which would in turn sell it to wireless companies.

The administration calculates that the auctions, coupled with more efficient government use of the spectrum, would raise \$27.8 billion in revenue over the next decade. But that figure

depends on whether broadcasters cooperate, and it is difficult to know whether the administration's calculations are correct.

“A plan such as this necessarily requires a lot of assumptions,” Matt Wood, associate director of the [Media Access Project](#), a nonprofit advocacy group, said in an e-mail. “It is very hard to predict exactly how much money these auctions would raise, and how much will have to be shared with incumbent licensees. Thus, while these initiatives may be on the right track, questions remain as to whether this plan will work.”

Mr. Obama is also asking Congress to make a one-time investment of \$5 billion to bring wireless coverage to rural areas, and is proposing to spend \$3 billion of the spectrum proceeds on research and development into new wireless technologies. And the president is calling for a \$10.7 billion commitment to support what the administration describes as a “nationwide wireless broadband network” for public safety.

The plan, which will be included in the budget Mr. Obama releases next week, requires Congressional approval at a time when Republicans have said they are interested in cutting federal spending. Mr. Obama's trip to northern Michigan was his latest appearance across the country to promote an agenda of selected investment in areas like clean energy, education and infrastructure that the president maintains will create jobs and boost the fragile recovery.

Mr. Obama chose Marquette, a city of about 21,000 on Lake Superior on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, because [Northern Michigan University](#) has worked on ways to expand wireless access for students and the surrounding areas. For more than a decade, the university has given a new laptop to every incoming student.

The university has also joined up with business to build what Mr. Obama called “a high-speed, next-generation wireless network,” and worked with nearby towns to expand the network by retrofitting their cell towers with new equipment.