State of the Net

February 9, 2026

Thank you for having me here today—it's great to be with you all for yet another excellent State of the Net conference. And I'm pleased to join you in my new capacity as President and CEO of NCTA to discuss how the industry I represent is navigating the age of Artificial Intelligence.

I grew up in eastern Colorado, a very rural, agricultural area, that most people think is Kansas. My family owned a farm equipment dealership there for 106 years. I was the 5th generation of my family to work there. I started when I was 11 years old, and they let me do some very high-skilled work. Sweep the floors and clean the bathroom. They still let me do that today. I remember my dad and grandad standing behind the parts counter in that century-old family farm implement dealership. I remember telling people as I grew up, "My dad? Well, he sells tractors—just like my grandad—and I'm darn proud of that." I'm still darn proud of that.

So, what does farm equipment and my family business have to do with AI? Well, to be honest, my family could probably be featured on an A&E Horders episode. We love to hang on to every item that has ever cycled through the implement dealership's doors. Old parts books, bearings, and sales brochures. It's like a giant physical ChatGPT where you can recall, compile, and deliver everything from history at your request. And while I was rummaging through some of these carefully curated inputs, I found an old McCormick-Deering tractor sales manual from February 1930, almost one hundred years old to the day.

This manual is both a window into a different era and a prescient blueprint for the future. Just like the promise of AI, the manual describes the modern marvel of the tractor as having "relieved [the farmer] of many irksome chores and made his work easier and pleasanter." It extolls the many uses of tractors from farming to oil fields and road construction to golf courses and lumber harvests.

And just like the pitfalls of AI, this manual predicted that some farmers would resist the march of progress with nostalgic worries about the loss of horse-powered machinery or even the false claim that, "horses are a cheap form of power for farm work because the farm furnishes their feed."

Instead, this book argues—as some do now—that new machinery allows business owners to focus more on what they do best. Sound familiar?

Sometimes we need to reach into the past to understand the future. This is an incredibly uncertain and exciting time for technologists, consumers, and company CEOs alike. The rapid onset of AI applications is both revolutionary and 'more-of-the-same-but-better' all at once. NCTA's members and the United States are at the forefront of these discussions, and we all stand to benefit. So whether you were a farmer 100 years ago afraid to let go of the trusty horse that had ploughed and planted the field for a generation along your side, or a business of today trying to gain a competitive advantage over ever growing global competition, change, progress, and opportunity and all its challenges, find us at every step of the way.

Today, I'm laying out a six-part plan, known as "CORE AI" to keep the cable industry, or what many now refer to it, the fiber connectivity industry, at the cutting-edge of AI.

First, core to the widespread adoption of AI is the connectivity infrastructure that underlies it all. This critical infrastructure isn't just a byproduct of AI. It is the backbone, the workhorse, the foundational element that made and makes AI possible. It is critical national security infrastructure that moves mountains of data at blazing speed to feed the constant hunger of an LLM and its queries. This critical connectivity infrastructure should be recognized and built into every economic and security policy our nation puts forward – a part of every national AI plan – whether its national economic security or our national defense, connectivity is core to AI.

Our operator members have invested more than $355 billion in high-speed broadband infrastructure over the last 20 years—that's more than the entire GDP of New Zealand or Greece. And of that amount, $26 billion was invested in 2025 alone. Enterprise adoption of AI and consumer use of AI simply would not be possible without this enormous financial commitment from the nation's leading broadband providers.

And our members are doing even more than spending billions of dollars to span the United States with 800,000 miles of fiber optic networks. Consumers are enjoying significantly higher speeds from these networks and deployments in spectrum

bands like 6 GHz. Nearly 90% of the United States can access gigabit connections from cable broadband providers as internet speeds have increased roughly 30% every year for the last sixteen years. I just wish *I* was running nine times faster than I was sixteen years ago…

While the connectivity industry's more than one million employees are hard at work from North Carolina to Ohio and Massachusetts and Washington, broadband prices remain well below the rate of inflation. The average American family's at-home internet bill is about $75, which is about half of the average cell phone bill.

And these lower prices are offered alongside continually higher speeds as we've seen a 98% reduction in cost per megabit over the past two decades. Even with the energy industry's boom, their prices have increased about 10% over the same time period.

As consumers and businesses realize the value of AI, our members can take credit for delivering the infrastructure that makes it all possible. And we're not only keeping prices low as we build—we're actively reducing prices for everyone, not just those that subscribe to our members' offerings.

We're cutting mobile connectivity prices by bundling cell phone and home internet plans at one low price. Around 40% of all new wireless subscribers in the third quarter of 2025 chose our members as their mobile providers. That saved American households $5 billion in 2025 alone as families can save up to $1,000 per year. Meanwhile, our members' low-cost offerings start around $15 per month, ensuring that around 95% of Americans have access to affordable broadband.

This unprecedented availability of high-speed internet is a major part of the AI equation. AI's benefits are not possible without consumer access to quality broadband.

Second, these nationwide benefits are at risk as a patchwork of state laws restricts AI providers, facilitators, and users alike. Core to AI is the ability to flourish without policy see-saws and whipsaws arbitrarily limiting investment opportunity connective capability.

Industry is fully capable of developing its own voluntary standards and has already made strides to standardize its approach to AI governance issues. As states like

California, Colorado, and Utah wrestle over how best to tackle AI-related issues, they should ensure they are collaborating with the companies who are front and center in these debates, including our nation's critical infrastructure players. CORE AI relies on the whole canvas of innovation, not pockets of players here and there.

Third, the U.S. must continue to invest in AI-focused research and development initiatives. During my time in Congress, I worked with Senator Gary Peters to pass the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act, which reauthorized our nation's R&D and scientific enterprise. Others have carried on that work today, but that work must not be done in siloes. It must be made systematic as part of a CORE AI driven-approach and not just the ebb and flow of legislative calendars.

The U.S. should leverage these R&D initiatives to achieve significant AI advancements that can enable improved dynamic spectrum sharing and better network management, including in the lower 7 GHz band. Our members already carry 90% of mobile traffic over their Wi-Fi networks—new sharing arrangements enabled by technological advancements will only increase that percentage.

And it isn't just creative new sharing arrangements—AI is already enabling better detection and mitigation of adversarial threats against our networks, as well as streamlining traffic management. We're constantly seeking to deepen our approach to these issues and we are closely tracking the work happening at all levels of government, including the President's Genesis Mission executive order. I'll never forget my dad helping my mom get ready for spring gardening one year, carrying out 50-pound bags of topsoil from the ACE Hardware, gruffly complaining, "There's a whole world of dirt out there, and she wants to buy more." Unlike dirt, there is no more spectrum being made – AI-inspired innovations and breakthroughs will help drive new solutions to insatiable demand. This is core to AI.

Fourth, we must ensure policymakers understand that strong copyright protections will not undermine AI innovation, but are core to AI alignment that protects investment, open innovation, and ingenuity. Our nation's flexible fair use doctrine already strikes a careful balance for our members who are creating TV content that entertains, informs and inspires. The courts must continue their case-by-case approach to these issues rather than abandon their responsibilities in lieu of some type of new AI-specific exception in the law.

NCTA's programmers have invested more than $528 billion into award-winning entertainment over the last twenty years. The more than 350,000 employees they support depend on robust IP protections and a predictable innovation environment.

Direct licensing agreements already serve as mechanisms for AI companies and creators to foster and preserve the best creative ideas.

Fifth, we must prepare for an AI future by continuing to prioritize major workforce and skills development efforts. Core to AI is the workforce - education, training, and reskilling programs will be critical for preparing the next generation of workers in fields as dynamic as edge computing, network operations, and data infrastructure management.

And lastly, we should develop a comprehensive understanding with our citizens to leverage AI and its power to address current problems, and the many use cases we never could have imagined. Core to AI includes solving the challenges AI itself will undoubtedly create in the minds and working reality of humanity.

In 2018 Henry Kissinger argued that society — intellectually and philosophically — had not fully grasped what it means to integrate powerful artificial intelligence into human life. As he engaged more in AI, posthumously, in Genisis, he framed AI as deeply transformative, capable of solving great global challenges (e.g., climate, conflict, inequality) **and** upending human decision-making. What would he say today? To be successful, we must fully develop our approach through a common national understanding, planning, industry engagement and a CORE AI approach. One that harnesses without diminishing the transformative power, while solving for the human dynamic Kissinger so focused upon.

Deployment of AI will only continue to grow in the next few years. If it's anything like the adoption of the internet—or the reduction in cost and speed explosion of the internet—it will compound faster than anyone could imagine.

To sum it all up, CORE AI will:

1) Invest in infrastructure that returns affordable consumer options
2) Avoid a harmful patchwork of state AI laws
3) Prioritize AI-related R&D
4) Protect copyright and content alongside AI advancement

5) Promote AI-enabling workforce and reskilling initiatives; and
6) Leverage AI for existing and novel use cases at every step, while empowering all to benefit.

This is CORE AI.

Through all of the unknown to come, I will continue to refer back to what is most familiar for me: selling tractors. As the 1930 manual warns: “Be careful not to assume a superior attitude,” when learning about and explaining new technologies.

And as Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas advised in this very same book: “Every farmer ought to study this mechanical age in which he lives…machinery is causing a revolution…just what results will be or how soon they will come cannot be stated, but very definite changes are inevitable. Machines cannot be ignored; they must be used.”

Thank you again for having me here today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you, and I look forward to what the future holds for us all.