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ISSUE GUIDE

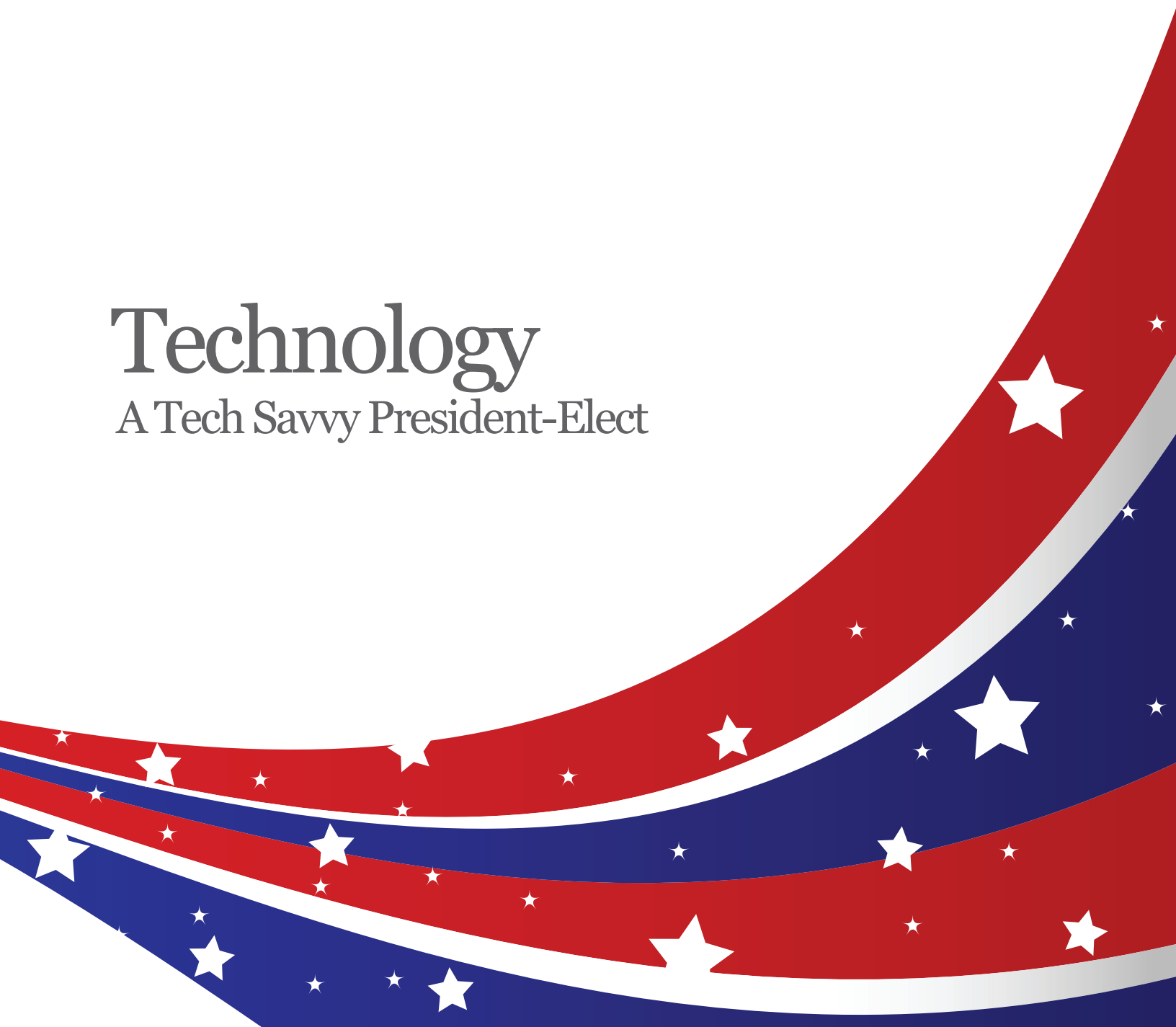
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# Technology

A Tech Savvy President-Elect



## Obama's Technology Plan at a Glance

President-elect Barack Obama has outlined an ambitious and broad vision for technology, which includes not just policy initiatives but an outlook on the emerging digital culture. He supports increased government investment in R&D as well as strong action to protect American intellectual property. He proposes redoubling efforts to expand the broadband network across the U.S. He supports federal enforcement of net neutrality and bans on Internet taxes, as well as privacy safeguards that do not undermine protection from terrorism. Finally, Obama would use the Internet to make government more open, more interactive, and more accountable.

## Barack Obama's Agenda, in Detail

Barack Obama's [agenda](#) is both an extensive set of policy proposals -- some better-defined than others -- and something approaching a manifesto for a digital culture. He promises to use technology not just to "solve our nation's most pressing problems" (among these health care, global warming and education) but also to revolutionize the way citizens interact with their government.

### Innovation

Obama would double federal funding for basic research and transform the government from "one of the most anti-science administrations in American history to one that embraces science and technology." He would reinstate and make permanent the R&D tax credit, which expired last year (but may be extended). He'd provide greater resources to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and give inventors the option of "citizen review" -- "a rigorous and public peer review that would produce a 'gold-plated' patent much less vulnerable to court challenge." Though he would step up antitrust enforcement in the U.S., he would "promote greater cooperation on international standards" for technology overseas. Obama would pursue free trade "consistent with our commitment to demand improved labor and environmental practices worldwide," and he would aggressively pursue enforcement for unfair trade practices, including violations of copyright and intellectual property. He would reform the H-1B visa system for [immigrants](#).

### Broadband Access

Obama would bring broadband (which he would redefine at faster speeds) to underserved communities -- and to every school, hospital, and library -- by repurposing the [Universal Service Fund](#) from voice to electronic communication, reallocating the wireless spectrum (with incentives for affordable remote broadband), and supporting public/private partnerships.

### The Internet, Privacy, and Security

Obama supports government-enforced net neutrality, which would prohibit Internet service providers from favoring certain websites (stores, say, or digital media providers or online

publications) over others with faster connections. Obama has [said](#) he supports a ban on Internet taxes. Obama would keep harmful material from the eyes of children by requiring ISPs to offer parental control technology as well as stepped-up law enforcement against would-be exploiters. Lastly, Obama promises online privacy (he would beef up the Federal Trade Commission's enforcement budget), protection from data theft as well as from misuse by an over-zealous government. According to his website, Obama "supports restrictions on how information gathered for terrorism investigations may be used" and "ensuring that law enforcement investigations and intelligence-gathering relating to U.S. citizens are done only under the rule of law."

### **Open Government**

Besides putting government information - including contracts, earmarks, grants, and lobbyist contacts -- online, Obama would, among other things, require most bureaucracies to conduct their "significant business" in public and online and to start pilot programs to open federal decision-making to input from the citizenry.

### **The Obama Record**

Obama co-sponsored 2007's "Internet Freedom Preservation Act," a net-neutrality mandate. On the other hand, he voted in favor of renewing the FISA law largely on President Bush's terms, which many civil liberties advocates claimed did not offer enough safeguards for personal liberties.

However, the clearest evidence of Obama's commitment to the digital future might not be found as much in his legislative history as in his campaign itself. By its own account, Obama's team has organized online hundreds of thousands of people who've created 6,500 volunteer groups and submitted 15,000 policy ideas -- and raised millions of dollars. In August, the campaign promised to let supporters be the first to find out -- by text message -- who would be the nominee's pick for vice president (the text announcing Joe Biden as Obama's running mate was sent around 3:00 a.m. on 8/23), in the [process collecting](#) cell phone numbers that can be used to get out the vote in November. "Obama's Internet campaign," says Obama's website, "is only the beginning of how Obama would harness the power of the Internet to transform government and politics."

## **What the Experts Say**

Trolling the Internet, it seems that a preponderance of thoughtful spokespeople for the tech revolution support Obama. That should come as no surprise, according to Rob Atkinson, president of the scrupulously nonpartisan [Information Technology and Innovation Foundation](#), a Washington-based think-tank. Conservatives [traditionally](#) have placed less importance on technology than liberals, says Atkinson. Then, too, "Obama has actually said more about it, and devoted more time to it."

But Atkinson argues that net neutrality is way overblown, even when it comes to tiered pricing arrangements that give some websites faster speeds than others. "It's possible that small businesses could be a little worse off, but I don't think it's as dire as some people make it out to be," says Atkinson. "And broadband speeds are getting faster now, so it will become a moot issue pretty soon."

Obama's proposal to double federal science funding is just as critical, according to Atkinson. "Seventy-seven out of 88 [important innovations](#) in 2006 had some federal involvement," he says. "That does suggest that having a robust federal research enterprise is important to small business innovation." However, while total R&D investment as a share of GDP has increased in other countries since at least 1991, it has remained flat in the U.S., and the government's share has [fallen](#).

Expanding broadband access to rural areas and providing service to low-income households is crucial to developing our economy, according to Atkinson. It empowers consumers, improves productivity for businesses, and fosters stronger economic growth -- including more start-ups -- for the communities that have it. However, we lag behind other developed nations in broadband penetration: the [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) ranks the U.S. [19th](#), while the ITIF puts us [15th](#). Atkinson believes that Obama is committed to serving low income and rural people with broadband.

