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During a public hearing in August to discuss the lack of high-speed internet service in Greene County, state **Rep. Pam Snyder** said it was time for state lawmakers to demand internet providers “beef up their service” in rural areas.

Snyder, D-Jefferson, moved forward with that promise Tuesday by introducing legislation in the state House to upgrade the standard for broadband service in Pennsylvania to increase download and upload speeds for rural customers. She said House Bill 2394 would update Title 66 governing public utilities and bring state standards in line with federal requirements. The bill would require customer broadband to offer at least 10 megabits per second for downloads and 1 Mbps for uploads.



That would vastly improve the current standards set in place in 2004 when the state Legislature updated Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's regulations on broadband development. That act required every resident in the state to have access to some form of high-speed internet service with at least 1.544 Mbps download speeds. Those current download speeds are now viewed as antiquated as faster technology had arrived, according to testimony from residents and business leaders during a public hearing at Waynesburg University to address concerns about internet speeds.

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"The state standards for high-speed broadband are woefully behind the times, and rural areas deserve the affordable and adequate service that 99 percent of urban residents and businesses already enjoy," Snyder said Tuesday upon announcing her bill. The bill already has five co-sponsors from both political parties and representing rural and urban areas.

During testimony at the Aug. 17 hearing, legislators and customers questioned why faster internet service isn't available in rural area. Steve Samara, president of Pennsylvania Telephone Association, testified that it is expensive to upgrade lines, especially in rural areas that are not as profitable for companies as urban regions that have numerous customers in city blocks.

However, there is \$2.2 million in federal Connect America Fund Phase II money earmarked for fiber upgrades in Greene County. Even though that money should be used in the county to help improve internet infrastructure, it still can be spent anywhere else in the state and possibly other areas of the country. There is currently \$23.7 million in unclaimed CAF II funds slated for Pennsylvania.

"Increasing speeds means that rural Pennsylvanians can tap the benefits provided by broadband through faster web downloads, improved video streaming, and service capable of supporting multiple users in a household," Snyder said. "This upgrade is crucial to the region's advancement." – *Washington Observer-Reporter*

U.S. Senator Tom Udall is urging the FCC to work toward the goal of bringing WiFi to all of the nation's school busses. In a [statement](#) posted to the Senator's website, Udall says he wrote a letter to the FCC urging it to extend the agency's E-rate program, which pays for internet access in schools, to provide WiFi on school buses so students "can have more time to do their homework." Udall said the idea was first suggested by a Hatch Valley High School student at a hearing on how the digital divide affecting students in rural and low-income communities.

"Broadband should help create educational opportunities for these children, not a new barrier to their success at school," Udall said in a letter to FCC boss Tom Wheeler. One problem is that while the e-Rate program certainly has its share of success stories and has improved over the last few years, it's a program that's historically [plagued with abuse](#) thanks to inconsistent government oversight. Historically, the FCC hasn't done all that well at following up to ensure that money doled out to carriers and schools is actually used as intended.

Between this and the logistics and cost of installing mobile hotspots on every bus Udall's plan simply isn't likely to every fully materialize. Still, the Senator says the idea could help shore up what he calls the "homework gap." "According to a Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau data, five million American households with school-age children do not have high-speed internet service at home," said the Senator. "While seven in 10 teachers assign homework that requires internet access, one in three households across the country do not have broadband."

That said, getting broadband into these under-served areas (which we've struggled to accomplish for decades) likely takes priority over turning the nation's school busses into rolling hotspots. – *DSL Reports*

One week.

That's how long eligible adults in Pennsylvania have to register to vote in order to cast ballots in the Nov. 8 election, which is highlighted by the presidential race between Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump. The registration deadline is Oct. 11. "Registering is the first step in exercising our fundamental right to vote," Secretary of State Pedro A. Cortes said in a statement.

Aside from president, statewide contests are for U.S. senator, attorney general, auditor general and treasurer. Regional contests will be held for 18 U.S. House seats, odd-numbered state Senate districts and all state House seats. The registration deadline affects anyone registering to vote for the first time or wishing to make changes to their existing registration status, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State. Those wishing to use an absentee ballot are urged to get moving and send the forms back by Oct. 21 to make sure they are counted in the final county tallies.

Pennsylvania requires voters to be: at least 18 years of age, a U.S. citizen for at least one month before the election and a resident of a specific county for at least 30 days prior to the election. The department's online system — register.votesPA.com — is a fast way to sign up or make changes to your name, address or party affiliation. Applications can also be printed out from this website, saving you a trip to a library or other government building.

You can now register to vote through text message in Pennsylvania. Eligible residents may use 2Vote, a new voter registration text messaging service. Text "PA" to "2Vote" (28683) on a cellphone to receive a link to the department's online voter registration application. Voters may deliver their voted absentee ballots in person to county election offices or mail them if there is adequate time for delivery. A postmark is not sufficient for the ballot to be counted.

For more information on voter registration, call the Department of State's toll-free hotline at 1-877-VOTESPA (1-877-868-3772) or visit VotesPA.com. — *Allentown Morning Call*



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