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August 21, 2017

[Fierce Cable Cord cutting pricier than keeping cable, NY Post columnist finds](#)

[Minneapolis Star Tribune Franken, open Internet advocates push back as FCC moves to dismantle 'net neutrality'](#)

[Fierce Telecom AT&T says FCC should adopt targeted pole attachment, make-ready reforms](#)

[Bloomberg Hollywood, Apple Said to Mull Rental Plan, Defying Theaters](#)

The internet used to be something of a luxury, but on Friday, the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce Governmental Affairs Committee discussed how it has become a commercial necessity they hope to expand on in Northumberland County.

In a meeting held at Masser's Restaurant, Paxinos, at the request of Rep. Kurt Masser (R-107), chamber President and CEO Bob Garrett said, "It's interesting that the internet, we thought, wasn't that big of an issue three years ago, but now has emerged almost as important as air to some businesses." Aimee Buehner, committee chair, noted while discussing the first item on the legislative agenda, which was modern, safe, efficient and reliable infrastructure systems, "realized that the broadband and high speed internet issues are as prominent as roadways and sewer lines and water lines."

The challenges of growing with broadband was explained by Sam Haulman, general manager of Service Electric Cablevision, who said the cable industry is not regulated by Pennsylvania's Public Utility Commission (PUC), but there are regulations in place and they must abide by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). There are more funding programs for broadband, which haven't been developed for the cable industry. Cable has been funded by industries such as the telephone industry.

Haulman spoke of Knoebels Amusement Resort and its expansions at Lake Glory Campground and Three Ponds Golf Course as successes in the creation of large broadband areas. Because of diversity in the path of fiber optic connections, a separate construction project was taken on and another circuit was constructed "so in any case of any situation that would affect the service coming in on the main path, they would always have an alternative path."

Not all areas of the county have the broadband support of Knoebels, such as the Anthracite Outdoor Adventure Area (AOAA), which has dealt with satellite issues affecting the business. Kathy Jeremiah, of Northumberland County Planning and Economic Development, said when the satellite goes out at the AOAA, employees must do all paperwork by hand. People want to get in and out of the office quickly to get on the trails, but when internet is down, they are unable to pre-register or fill out a liability waiver ahead of time.

Jeremiah said, "We are in the process of receiving a grant for a new cell tower for our 9-1-1 center and also to tap in then for the AOAA and the Trailhead Campground to provide them with service." Jeremiah said she would be interested in creating a map of underserved internet areas, something SEDA-COG principal ITG specialist Scott Kramer said he is currently working on.

SEDA-COG is working with several counties on a feasibility study, coverage survey and master plan to identify and mitigate the problem of not having rural broadband in the area. He said they are attempting to get more people on board and extended an invitation to Northumberland County if officials wish to participate. The application will be submitted at the end of the year in hopes of receiving a 2018-19 fiscal grant to get the project under way.

New York Times
Crowded TV Market
Readies For Tech Giants

Politico
Tech firms' fight
against hate could haunt them

Bloomberg
Tech Goes From White House to Doghouse in Trump's Washington

Philadelphia Inquirer
Editorial: Less howling helped Wolf with legislature, but PA budget fight needs his bark

Buehner said the committee is looking at the future of residential broadband due to the market created by people working from home. People are coming into the county to take jobs with universities or hospitals and looking at rural areas to live, but are unable to do so because broadband isn't provided to allow them to work from home.



The image is a promotional graphic for AT&T SportsNet. At the top left is the AT&T globe logo, followed by the text "AT&T SPORTSNET" in large, bold, blue and white letters. Below this, there are two rows of circular logos for various sports teams. The first row includes the Pittsburgh Pirates Baseball logo (a yellow 'P' on a black circle with "PITTSBURGH PIRATES BASEBALL SINCE 1887" around it) and the Pittsburgh Penguins logo (a black penguin on a yellow triangle). The second row contains logos for the Pittsburgh Steelers (a yellow, red, and blue star), West Virginia (a blue 'WV'), Michigan (a green 'M' on a white circle with "THE WARRIORS" below it), Penn State (a blue lion head), Pitt (a white circle with "Pitt" in black), Villanova (a blue 'V'), Detroit (a red 'D'), Robert Morris (a blue and red logo with "ROBERT MORRIS" below it), Notre Dame (a gold 'ND' on a white circle), and Wake Forest (a yellow 'WF' on a white circle with "WAKE FOREST" below it). At the bottom of the graphic, the address "323 North Shore Drive | Suite 200 | Pittsburgh, PA 15212" and phone number "412.316.3800" are listed.

Conrad A. Falvello Esq., district director for Rep. Lou Barletta (R-11), informed the committee Verizon had been granted \$140 million through a Connect America Fund, funded by the Federal Universal Service Fund allocated to different providers throughout each state. The fund was “presumptively to be used in Pennsylvania to build internet infrastructure to areas of the state that were underserved or not served,” but for reasons unknown, Verizon waived it.

The \$140 million in funds was given back to the FCC, and there stands a possibility it will be spread out to other states at the discretion of the commission, according to Falvello. “As you would imagine, Pennsylvania’s Public Utility Commission (PUC) and Department of Community Economic Development (DCED) got wind of this. They filed a petition on April 19 in hopes to modify the action formula so the distribution of those funds, being that Verizon isn’t going to use them, is made somewhat more favorable for those in Pennsylvania who do want to use it and who do want to expand infrastructure,” Falvello said. He is unsure if the funds include cable companies,

believing they are instead for telecommunications, but he told the committee he will do more research to learn more.

The Association of Internet Service Providers filed a petition in opposition to PUC and DCED’s petition to modify the funds, but according to Falvello, the Pennsylvania delegation, both congressional and senatorial, have come out in support of the PUC and DCED petition, including Barletta, Sen. Bob Casey and Sen. Pat Toomey. – *Shamokin News-Item*

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative members returned three incumbents to the cooperative board of directors during the utility’s annual meeting on July 25 at the Troy Fairgrounds. During his report, President and CEO Craig Eccher said the cooperative is committed to providing its members with safe, reliable, reasonably priced electricity. “We do this by making strategic system investments, ongoing maintenance, prudent financial decisions and, most importantly, through the talent and dedication of our employees,” he said.

The CEO also updated members about the cooperative’s plan to bring high-speed fiber-optic internet service to a portion of its service territory in Potter County later this year. The proposed pilot project will

ultimately help the cooperative determine the feasibility of offering high-speed broadband internet service to Tri-County members throughout the cooperative's service territory. "Cooperatives may be the only option to bring true broadband to rural areas, just like it took cooperatives to bring electricity to those areas," Eccher said.

Whiting also detailed the co-op's focus on fiber optic technology during his chairman's report. He noted that bringing high-speed broadband to rural areas, while a daunting and expensive task, could be a boon to economic development in the region. "Almost every business and industry, from the medical field to manufacturing, transfers large amounts of data that require high-speed connectivity," he said. "Communities that don't have that are disadvantaged compared to those that do, so if we can find a way to deliver that, I think we'll see some economic benefit."

With headquarters in Mansfield, Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative has served the residents of northcentral Pennsylvania since 1937. Today the cooperative provides electricity to 16,700 members in Tioga, Potter, Bradford, Lycoming, Clinton, McKean and Cameron counties. — *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*

In an election year, it is the fortunate politician who can stand, arms akimbo, between a voter and an unrelenting foe. In much of rural Georgia, and in some urban deserts, that enemy isn't Kim Jong-un or terrorists from the Middle East or an army of white supremacists. It is the local Internet provider.

In a recent interview, State House Speaker David Ralston (R) named **improved Internet access** in rural Georgia as a priority for his chamber in 2018. State Sen. Steve Gooch (R) would have you know that he filed a bill on the same topic months before that. The mystery of the missing megabytes has also become an essential paragraph in stump speeches for statewide candidates across the political spectrum.

And U.S. Rep. Doug Collins (R) says to one and all: Welcome to the party. "I'm excited to actually see the state, especially statewide candidates and others, recognizing that broadband's a problem in rural America," Collins said this week. "That's actually encouraging to see. We've been on this for five years." Collins is spending much of the August recess talking about his bill to increase competition among those accepting government cash as part of federal program to increase broadband access in overlooked communities.

The congressman has become the ultimate consumer advocate in his Ninth District, where Windstream — an outfit based in Little Rock, Ark. — is the main Internet provider. Collins tells of the sheriff who lost his Internet service for three weeks. Of the EMS unit in White County that was cut off for a day. "I have pharmacists," he said. "They can't process credit cards, they can't access records. This has become an economic development issue. "Companies have got to stop coming into rural areas, buying telephone companies and Internet companies, thinking they can use the federal funds to basically offset their bottom line and not provide the services," Collins said.

Last year, local news outlets reported on a meeting between Collins and Windstream CEO Tony Thomas in breathless terms usually reserved for U.S.-Russia summit meetings. "We have people now who actually call our office before they call Windstream. This is that big of a problem," Collins said. And the resentment is not unlike the kind stirred 'way back when a Ma Bell monopoly said you could have any color telephone you wanted, as long as it was black.

Collins' bill, one of several in Congress aimed at rural Americans, **would defer capital gains taxes on Internet investments** in state-designated "gigabyte opportunity zones," to encourage more companies to crack the rural Internet nut. But the Gainesville congressman would also like to see an end to the "monopoly" established by the Connect America Fund, a program operated under the auspices of the Federal Communications Commission.

Windstream is drawing those CAF funds now. But as long as it's doing so, no competitors can do the same — if those funds are used in the same territory. The program discourages competition, Collins maintains. We called Windstream after talking with Collins, and were connected with Jarrod Berkshire, president of Windstream's Georgia operations. The CAF program, Berkshire said, "wasn't designed to reach every customer, and it never will. Rural broadband is not a switch you can flip and have it come on." He counsels patience.

Windstream has a broadband signal within reach of 740,000 households and businesses, but for every federal dollar it takes, the company's investors spend ten, he said. Steve Gooch, the state senator from Dahlonega, also represents an area dominated by Windstream. Poor Internet service is the top complaint he hears from constituents, he said.

[Gooch's Senate Bill 232](#) would make it easier, and cheaper, for Internet providers to obtain access to public rights-of-way for their fiber. It would also specifically authorize electric membership corporations to get into the Internet business – another effort to increase competition. Like Collins, Gooch thinks that expanded broadband access is a foundational cure for much of what ails rural Georgia, from health care to a lack of jobs to classrooms hampered by a lack of access to both teachers and information.

An opioid treatment center is scheduled to open in Dahlonega on Sept. 10. It needs Internet speeds of 100 megabits per second. “In rural Georgia, you’re lucky to get 10 megabits — that are dependable,” Gooch said. He’s looking for a grant that can be used to fund the necessary fiber optic lines to the treatment center. “But the problem is that you can’t do that every day for every business,” Gooch said.

One of the more interesting moves related by Gooch could happen outside his legislation. The Dahlonega senator said the state Department of Transportation is exploring the idea of running mass-capacity fiber optic cables along Georgia’s interstate system. Part of the capacity would be reserved for the DOT, perhaps to help guide autonomous vehicles of the future. But the private operator of the cable system would also serve as a kind of broker to Internet providers in many of the state’s more distant corners.

At bottom, what we’re talking about is a redefining of what we mean when we say “infrastructure.” “In many areas, we don’t need a road. We may need a bridge fixed, but we don’t need a road. We need the infrastructure of the Internet,” said Collins, the congressman. “We’re not saying a guy who lives on top of a mountain 40 miles away is going to have 100 gigabit speed. But we’ve got to ask, what can we do for the vast majority of people who are being left out of this?” – *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

I was pleased to see a recent [Denver Post article](#) address the growing differences between rural and urban areas of Colorado. It was particularly important that the article highlighted the disparity in broadband internet access, noting that the disparity is an “economic equalizer.” What it fails to identify, however, is the reason broadband availability improved from 59 percent to 77 percent in recent years: a competitive free marketplace that encourages investment.

That marketplace has been significantly threatened by the Obama administration’s 2015 decision to classify the internet as a public utility and strictly regulate it. That move, purportedly taken to enforce net neutrality, amounted to a government takeover of the internet that undermines market forces and depresses investment in broadband networks.

The federal government needn’t treat the internet like a utility to guarantee net neutrality. Republicans and Democrats both support the basic idea that users should not be blocked or rerouted from certain sites by internet service providers — so it shouldn’t be difficult to pass bipartisan legislation that will codify net neutrality while also preserving the idea that an open market should determine winners and losers online, not the government.

While conditions have improved, nearly a fourth of the state still lacks broadband access. We need federal legislation to protect the internet. Let’s not make the same mistakes previously generations did by allowing Colorado’s rural areas to lose critical opportunities due to lagging access to phone service. – **Op-ed by Colorado State Rep. Dave Williams (R) in Denver Post**

