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NewsClips

August 28, 2017

Erie Times-News
[Erie customers soon required to have digital cable boxes](#)

New York Times
[Spectrum Workers' Strike Approaches 5-Month Mark](#)

Dallas Morning News
[In FCC complaint, AT&T accused of discriminating against low-income neighborhoods](#)

Seattle Times
[The inside story of the Pac-12 Networks' impasse with DirecTV](#)

Reuters
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Associated Press

Top 10 Reasons Why Ironton Telephone Should Be Your Telcom Partner:



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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, House Speaker David Ralston, R-Blue Ridge, named [improved Internet access](#) in rural Georgia as a priority for his chamber in 2018. State Sen. Steve Gooch, R-Dahlonega, 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-Gainesville, 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.

What will the House do? It's Pennsylvania's \$2B question

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Sen. Pat Toomey schedules televised town hall for Thursday

Philadelphia Daily News Of Rendell, Rizzo, and all this to-do over statues

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; also in AJC, Georgia's Lt. Gov. has broadband expansion as a priority**

The CEO of a cybersecurity company woke up in a bad mood earlier this month, so he decided to kick neo-Nazis off the internet. Cloudflare, which protects websites from being shut down by attacks, had been selling its service to the Daily Stormer, a long-time cyber outpost for racists, bigots and hate. After the violence and death in Charlottesville, Va., Cloudflare CEO Matthew Prince was determined to cut them off.

By his own assessment, it was a personal and arbitrary choice. "This was my decision," Prince wrote in an email to his staff. "Our terms of service reserve the right for us to terminate users of our network at our sole discretion. My rationale for making this decision was simple: the people behind the Daily Stormer are a***** and I'd had enough."

Any good-hearted person in his position probably would have done the same thing - but was it the right thing? As Prince told his company, this decision opens the door to ramifications we can't yet predict. "Literally, I woke up in a bad mood and decided someone shouldn't be allowed on the Internet. No one should have that power." The dark corners of the internet have become a refuge for the vilest forms of white supremacy and home-grown fascism. There they can fester and grow

unencumbered until, as we saw in Charlottesville, they reappear in public light bearing torches and firearms.

Shutting them down online helps get to the source of so much hate in our society, but who gets to make that call? "We need to have a discussion around this, with clear rules and clear frameworks. My whims and those of Jeff [Bezos] and Larry [Page] and Satya [Nadella] and Mark [Zuckerberg], that shouldn't be what determines what should be online," Prince told Gizmodo, a technology and science blog. "I think the people who run The Daily Stormer are abhorrent. But again I don't think my political decisions should determine who should and shouldn't be on the internet."

Today we may celebrate the fact that hate groups are being driven out of cyberspace - good riddance. How do we guarantee that web companies don't exploit this power to stifle free speech? This conversation shows why net neutrality policy is so important. Major telecommunications companies, like AT&T and Comcast, control the underlying network that powers the internet. Websites like Facebook and Twitter provide a powerful service on top of that network. But if those websites start censoring conversations or booting users, there's always room for a competing upstart. Don't like Google? Try Bing.

However, because they control internet service itself, telecoms have the ability to shut down the upstarts. It would be as if a power company could charge people more, or deny electricity service, based on its own arbitrary standards. Don't like it? You probably don't have much choice. Nearly half of all U.S. households have only one option for wired broadband service.

In the 21st century, internet access has become another must-have utility. It should be regulated like one. Companies like Cloudflare can choose their users - that option shouldn't be available to Comcast or AT&T. The likes of Prince, Zuckerberg and Bezos need to have a public conversation about the role they play in fighting hate groups and protecting freedom of expression. Telecoms, on the other hand, just have to ensure the internet works. – *Houston Chronicle*

Wireless networks along the Texas coast suffered outages as a result of Hurricane Harvey, federal regulators said, leaving customers in some counties with limited or no cellphone service. Rockport, Texas, near where the hurricane made landfall, was the hardest hit, according to the Federal Communications Commission. About 95% of cell sites there aren't working, the agency said Sunday, meaning cellphone users relying on the sites can't send or receive phone calls or data.

Of the 7,804 cell sites across the region, 320 are out of service, or about 4%. The hardest-hit areas are Aransas County, Refugio County, Calhoun County and San Patricio County. Those counties were subject to mandatory evacuation orders, so it was unclear how many people are affected by the outages. It was also unclear which carriers stayed online and which went down, because carriers aren't required to disclose the information publicly.

When cell towers stop working, customers can't access the web, send calls or texts from their cellphones unless they have Wi-Fi from their cable or wireline telecom company. If only a few towers go down, service might get slower as more people connect to the remaining towers. At least 148,565 people in the path of the hurricane were without cable or wireline service on Sunday, the FCC said.

Most cell towers have backup batteries that can last up to eight hours, and fuel generators that can take over after that. But they can still go down if they get flooded or if equipment gets blown off the tower, carriers say. Verizon Communications Inc. said it sent in extra crews to Texas and topped off fuel in each tower's backup generators in the days leading up to the storm. "Verizon's network continues to perform well throughout the storm's impacted area," the carrier wrote in an email. "As anticipated, commercial power is out in many places throughout Texas, but backup generators are running and refueling vendors are on standby to ensure facilities continue operating." Verizon is offering free service to monthly subscribers in the affected area until Sept. 8.

A Sprint Corp. spokeswoman said "a relatively small number of cell sites are impacted due to commercial power outages but overall the network is holding up well." Sprint is giving free unlimited service until Sept. 1. A T-Mobile spokeswoman said about half of its Corpus Christi market, which includes Rockport, had some level of service degradation, a less disruptive impact than the fallout from other recent storms, including Hurricane Matthew last year.

She said impassable roads were keeping crews from responding to damaged cell towers but fewer than 50 locations were affected. T-Mobile also offered free calling and texting for customers in the affected areas and those trying to reach them. Some crews were ready to roll out new generators and equipment on Saturday but were waiting for the storm to subside before moving, she said. "Keep

in mind that Harvey is still really young,” she said Saturday. “We don’t know what’s going to happen over the next week.”

An AT&T spokesman said the company’s networks in South Texas were performing well so far. “Our technicians are working to restore service to affected areas as quickly and safely as conditions allow,” he said. Carriers recommend people keep cellphones and backup batteries charged and use text messages instead of voice calls to reduce network congestion. Landline telephones that use copper will work during power outages, but landlines that rely on new technology, known as IP, won’t. – *Wall Street Journal*

An important question hanging over Pennsylvania’s state government is whether the commonwealth’s credit rating, which already is one of the nation’s worst, is destined to deteriorate further. As the current stalemate continues over fully funding the nearly \$32 billion 2017-18 budget passed on June 30, and which Gov. Tom Wolf allowed to become law without his signature, the two houses of the Legislature remain about as far apart on a final funding decision as they were two months ago.

Exacerbating the possibility of a further credit-rating downgrade is the prospect of the state running out of cash before a funding accord is hammered out — later if not sooner. On the sooner side, state Treasurer Joe Torsella has projected that Pennsylvania will run out of money on Tuesday, while Wolf on Tuesday projected that would occur Sept. 15. But even if Torsella signs off on a loan from the Treasury to keep the state afloat for now — there’s no guarantee that will happen — or even if Torsella and State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale would agree to authorize the Wolf administration to borrow money from a bank, that won’t fix what’s really wrong with this state’s finances — the lack of enough recurring revenue to avoid budget crises.

Neither the House nor the Senate, regardless of what they’ve done or tried to do during the 2017-18 budget-preparation exercise, has acted responsibly on behalf of recurring money. And by allowing the 2017-18 state budget to become law without his signature, without a budget-balancing revenue plan accompanying the budget’s spending side, Wolf allowed himself to become party to the fiscal irresponsibility in which the commonwealth currently is mired.

It rightly can be suggested that Wolf should have wielded his veto stamp in an effort to keep lawmakers in Harrisburg to finish all aspects of the 2017-18 budget. But even without a veto, rank-and-file lawmakers should have rejected their leaders’ decision to send them home. By not balking, lawmakers ignored their responsibility to the people who elected them — people who would pay the higher borrowing costs associated with a lower credit rating. And it’s safe to say that even if the Legislature dodges the proverbial bullet by balancing the 2017-18 spending plan without ensuring recurring revenue, state taxpayers likely are destined for an unpleasant fiscal reality in the future.

News coming out of Harrisburg last week indicated that House lawmakers were putting finishing touches on a plan to counter a Senate budget-balancing proposal that leans heavily on borrowing and tax increases. But with the prospect that the House plan will be far from what the Senate deems necessary, cause for optimism regarding a quick settlement seems dim.

Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, R-Jefferson, characterized Pennsylvania as being at a fork in the road regarding the annual fiscal package. He indicated that either \$2.2 billion of spending should be axed from the budget, regardless of who is hurt, or take the necessary steps to find that amount of money. Torsella’s Treasury has warned that if the right decisions aren’t forthcoming, Pennsylvania could be facing a \$3 billion shortfall at this time next year — and probably with a lower credit rating. The most puzzling question hovering over Harrisburg is why most rank-and-file lawmakers are so quiet about the unfinished budget when they’re so vocal about touting their qualifications on the campaign trail. – *Altoona Mirror editorial*



**Broadband
Cable Association
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717-214-2000 (f) 717-214-2020
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