

March 10, 2021

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INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY FOR THE
RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Regulatory Headlines

[Fixing the FCC's Broadband Map](#)

Millions of Americans around the country lack access to fast internet at home, a need that's become especially critical over the past year as the COVID-19 pandemic forced everything from family gatherings to classes and business meetings to go online...a fundamental flaw remains in not knowing where the problems lie.

[Pandemic Boosts Broadband Policy](#)

Now that the pandemic has made it clear just how essential it is to be connected to high-speed internet, lawmakers are finally putting billions of dollars into funding government programs to expand access to it.

[GOP Pushes FCC on Broadband Maps](#)

Senate and House Republican leaders are pressuring FCC acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel to improve FCC broadband mapping ASAP after saying they got an answer from staff on the progress of that effort that did not sit well with them.

[COVID Bill Includes Broadband Funding](#)

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan COVID-19 aid bill that passed the Senate Saturday (March 6) will allocate another \$17 billion-plus for broadband. Sen. Mark Warner pointed out Saturday that that was the largest-single federal investment in broadband infrastructure and affordability.

[FCC Seeks Comment on RDOF ETCs](#)

The FCC is seeking comment on requests for eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) status for winning Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) bidders that don't already have ETC status. Considering the controversy that some winning bids have generated, the commission is likely to receive some spirited comments.

[Broadband Speed Definition Argument](#)

One of the most debated issues in the broadband industry has always been the very essence of broadband itself – a consistent broadband speed definition.



Market Watch

[Star Wars—Dish Battles SpaceX](#)

[Broadband Customers Increased in 2020](#)

[Windstream to Tap Into EBB and RDOF](#)

[Dish Eyes TDS Acquisition](#)



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Questions? Comments?
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Technology Trends

New and notable technology and services

Microsoft Exchange Server Hack

Four zero-day vulnerabilities in Microsoft Exchange Server are being actively exploited by a state-sponsored threat group from China and appear to have been adopted by other cyberattackers in widespread attacks. While in no way believed to be connected to the SolarWinds supply chain attack that has impacted an estimated 18,000 organizations worldwide -- so far -- there is concern that lags in patching vulnerable servers could have a similar impact, or worse, on businesses.

Biden Challenged by Early Cyber Threats

The Biden administration is grappling with two major cyber incidents in its first 50 days in office, underscoring the challenge the new White House faces from foreign actors. Russia and China are suspected in the two incidents, which may have compromised thousands of federal, state and private groups for long periods of time before discovery. The effect has been to move cybersecurity up the list of the administration's priorities.

Starlink to Connect Planes, Trains, Autos

SpaceX, which is delivering satellite broadband to select homes in the US, wants to conquer the next frontier of satellite broadband by connecting aircraft, trains and other moving vehicles. The company outlined its ambitions in a new filing with the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Musk, the CEO of SpaceX, has not been shy about sharing the company's ambitions to connect transport systems with his constellation of Starlink satellites. He's already outlined its plans to put Starlink satellites on trains in Europe and North America via tweets.

The 4th Industrial Revolution

We are in the midst of what many are calling the Fourth Industrial Revolution, or Industry 4.0. This is a time of disruption, massive change, opportunities, and significant risks. Fortunes will shift, companies will fail, and new companies will rise from the ashes.

NC Satellite Internet Pilot

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's office on Thursday announced that some students in two of its most rural counties will soon be able to access the internet via satellites beaming signals from low Earth orbit. The program is the latest effort state and local authorities have used to boost students' internet access during the pandemic, which has also seen governments use parking-lot Wi-Fi, device giveaways and even giant, solar-powered routers.

IN FOCUS

Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act

Representative James Clyburn (D-SC) is set to introduce the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act this week. The Bill contains several provisions, including the establishment of an Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth at NTIA, addressing digital equity among socially disadvantaged people, broadband affordability and pricing transparency, expansion of broadband access, and a new broadband infrastructure financing program.

The new Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth is to study the affordability of broadband services and specifically to determine if federal funds, including the federal USF, have expanded access to socially disadvantaged individuals as compared to non-socially disadvantaged individuals. A report would be due in 18 months, after consulting with the FCC and RUS.

The Emergency Connectivity Fund (i.e., the Emergency Broadband Benefit program) is provided an additional authorization of \$2 billion through fiscal year 2026. Note that this authorization of funding would still need to be appropriated by Congress.

Under "broadband transparency" the Bill would require that "Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Commission shall issue final rules that include a requirement for the annual collection by the Commission of data relating to the price and subscription rates of terrestrial fixed broadband, fixed wireless broadband, satellite broadband, and mobile broadband. "

For broadband access, the Act would authorize and appropriate \$79.5 billion for the current fiscal year, and authorize the same amount for

fiscal years through 2026, to expand broadband access in unserved areas. Some features of the legislation:

- * Separate from current USF programs
- * ETC designation not required
- * 75% of the funding goes to a national competitive bidding system
- * 25% of the funds go to states, to be used for broadband access using competitive bidding systems
- * Unserved means areas with no or low (90% of population) access to 25/3 Mbps
- * 20% of national and state-allocated funds must be used for 1 gigabit (synchronous) service

The "Broadband Infrastructure Finance and Innovation" portion would lead to new ways for federal financing of eligible broadband projects, for state, local and Tribal governments.

There is a lot to take in with this Bill, including the fact that it relies heavily on reverse auctions to distribute support. However, it takes some steps in the right direction by recognizing that both affordability and availability are important.

Reminders

- ⇒ **988 Suicide Prevention Hotline.** Mandatory 10-digit dialing transition has started for certain area codes containing 988 NXXs. See the 8/19/20 *Special Bulletin*, 8/20/20 email distribution of the NANPA transition schedule, and 11/18/20 & 1/28/21 email distributions of NANPA's latest guidance.
- ⇒ **8YY Access Charge Reform**—All current intrastate originating access charge rate elements for toll free/8YY calls were frozen as of 11/27/2020. There will likely be intrastate tariff filings necessary to meet some of the requirements, and some tricks for ensuring any adverse revenue effects are properly recognized in the interstate CAF ICC calculation.



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