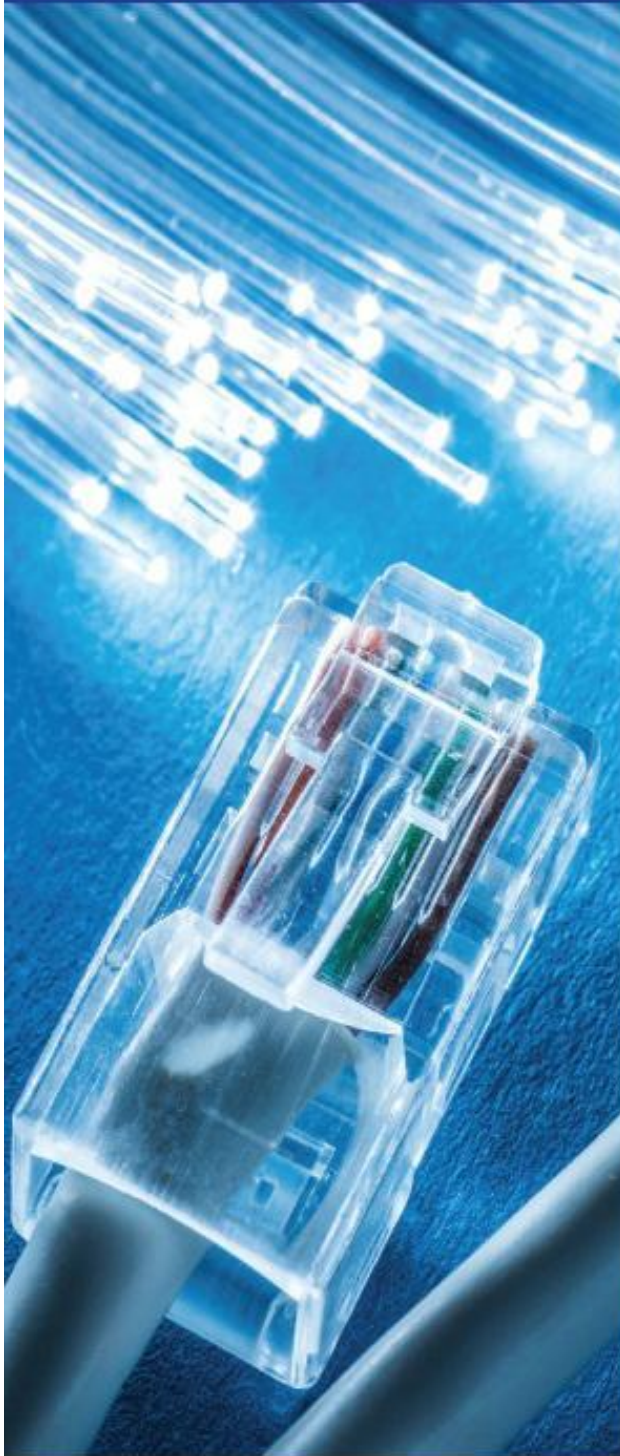


PA Townships **Value Relationship** with Cable Industry



The Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors salutes a longstanding working relationship with BCAP that has benefited millions of our commonwealth's citizens.

PSATS members have had successful partnerships with the commonwealth's cable companies for decades. The result has been a Pennsylvania-born technology that continues to provide entertainment, education, and communications services for generations of our state's citizens and businesses.

If there was ever a template for blending technology providers with local government, our 70-year-old working relationship with BCAP members is it.

PSATS looks forward to continuing and growing its partnership with broadband cable companies in the years ahead to deliver services to ALL Pennsylvanians!



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of Township Supervisors**

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inauguration for
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insurrection

Late last year, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed two pieces of legislation that will help deploy broadband to our state's rural areas. Act 98 of 2020 relaxed restrictions on the ability of Pennsylvania electric cooperatives, cable companies and other entities to attach broadband units to existing utility poles. Act 132 of 2020 provided about \$5 million in funding for nongovernmental groups to install broadband across underserved areas of Pennsylvania.

We can all agree that this is good news for our rural communities and residents, many of whom are without high-speed broadband internet service. But more still needs to be done to ensure that this essential service is available, and affordable, for all of our rural residents. Since the early 2000s, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania has been documenting and reporting the need for broadband service in our rural areas. Recently, in 2018, the Center's board of directors hosted a public hearing in Wellsboro to gather information from broadband service providers and consumers about the issues, challenges, and opportunities for delivering broadband services in rural Pennsylvania.

At the Wellsboro hearing, we were told many times that broadband access meant so much more than interactive gaming or connecting with family and friends. We heard that broadband access meant connecting with your health care provider, completing a classroom assignment, and maintaining and expanding your business. Fast forward two years, and we all realize just how important broadband is to our healthcare system, schools, businesses, and everyday life. In concert with the 2018 hearing, the Center sponsored research to learn more about broadband access and availability statewide. That research, published in 2019, collected more than 11 million broadband speed tests from across Pennsylvania and found that median speeds across most areas of the state did not meet the Federal Communications Commission's criteria to qualify as a broadband connection.

That research documented the varying levels of actual connectivity speeds that Pennsylvanians experienced while participating in a broadband test. The maps produced from those tests made it perfectly clear that a digital divide in Pennsylvania is real, and that connectivity speeds are substantially slower in our rural counties. The study was a first of its kind and clearly showed the shortcomings of the FCC procedure to assess broadband connectivity speed in our area.

To follow up the 2019 research, the Center sponsored another study to learn if rural Pennsylvanians were willing to pay for broadband services. That research, published late last year, underscored rural Pennsylvanians' willingness to pay for high-speed broadband services and showed that urban and rural Pennsylvania residents are receiving inequitable broadband service — not only in terms of broadband speed, but also in the prices they pay for service.

While we know that there are some challenges of deploying broadband because of geography and isolation, we also know that there are solutions. Take for example the work of Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc., one of 13 rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania servicing Tioga, Potter, Bradford, Lycoming, Clinton, McKean and Cameron counties, which is now building a broadband network in north central Pennsylvania. With the help of state and federal grants and loans, Tri-Co Connections, the internet subsidiary of Tri-County Rural Electric, will install 2,800 miles of fiber lines throughout the cooperatives service area over the next six years.

Tri-County had its challenges — including a large senior population and a large concentration of second homes in its territory — but it also saw the

opportunities and benefits of working to provide broadband to its communities. Things like preventing youth outmigration, promoting tourism, creating jobs, improving access to telehealth, and increased housing values, all proved more beneficial than waiting for some other service provider to come along.

Act 98 may encourage others to take up the challenge of providing broadband to our rural communities. Relaxing the regulations on cooperatives was one of the recommendations in our most recent research on broadband internet services, *Broadband Demand: The Cost and Price Elasticity of Broadband Internet Service in Rural Pennsylvania*.

As the legislature begins the 2021-22 session, this research provides additional recommendations on the next steps that may be taken to continue the deployment of high-speed broadband internet service to rural Pennsylvania. For example, it recommends changing Pennsylvania's current definition of "broadband," which is defined as 1.544 megabits per second download and 128 kilobits per second upload speed, to meet or exceed federal definitions for broadband.

Over the years, and especially last year, we've all come to realize just how important broadband is to our economy, our healthcare system, our schools, and more. Broadband deployment will continue to be an issue in the years ahead. The Center has been promoting broadband development in our rural areas for more than a decade and it will continue to provide valuable data and policy recommendations. Rural Pennsylvania needs high-speed broadband services. – **Op-ed by Sen. Gene Yaw (R-Lycoming) in *Bradford Era***

A divided York County board voted Wednesday to extend a contract with Katapult Engineering, the company managing the county's rail trail broadband internet project, despite objections from one commissioner over lack of access to part of the trail. The project to build a fiber optic cable network along the York County Heritage Rail Trail was scheduled to be completed by Dec. 31, but the work has been delayed because a portion of the railroad is still owned by Genesee and Wyoming Inc. and the county needs permission to install the cables there.

Commissioner Ron Smith opposed extending the Katapult contract until the county secured right-of-way access from the railroad. "To me, it's prudent to wait a little while until we figure this out and then proceed forward," Smith said. The Katapult contract stipulates the county will pay a maximum of \$20,000 per month through the end of March for project management, and Smith said he doesn't want the county paying all that money if there's no work being done.

Commissioner Julie Wheeler said the county will only be billed for services actually rendered, and that the county won't be automatically paying Katapult a daily rate. The right-of-way issue is expected to be resolved soon, Wheeler said, and York County administrator Mark Derr said he has no reason to believe the railroad will deny access to the county. The project will likely be complete within two months, Derr said. The board voted 2-1 to extend the contract with Katapult. Wheeler and Commissioner Doug Hoke voted in favor of the contract. Smith voted no. The portion of the railroad still owned by G&W runs along King's Mill Road and Indian Rock Dam Road in Spring Garden Township, Derr said.

In 2020, the York County commissioners used \$1.2 million in federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act for the broadband internet pilot project, spearheaded by the York County Economic Alliance. In an email Wednesday, Silas Chamberlain, vice president of economic and community development for YCEA, said the fiber optic cable network wouldn't provide internet access on its own, but it could entice an internet service provider to move into the area. "Having the broadband infrastructure in place is the first step in attracting an ISP, which is typically dissuaded from

entering a rural area because of upfront costs of creating the fiber backbone," he said.

To ensure that the cable network would actually function and transmit service — a requirement of the CARES Act funding, Chamberlain said — the county installed a wireless antenna at Hanover Junction near Seven Valleys to transmit service to an area covering about one square mile. Once an ISP moves into the area to use the network, an estimated 16,600 residents and more than 2,000 businesses will have access to high-speed internet service, Chamberlain said, and the antenna will be replaced with permanent infrastructure.

In addition to the pilot project, the county board commissioned a feasibility study in August to find out how much it would cost, and what it would entail, to provide high-speed internet access to all of York County. Wheeler said she expects to receive a draft report of the study's results within a week, and the results will be presented to the public in early February. — ***York Dispatch***

It was impossible to watch a duo of dramatic events — the assault on the U.S. Capitol two weeks back; the inauguration of President Joe Biden on Wednesday — without thinking these historic happenings simply must portend change. But how quickly? And to what end?

Does the Capitol riot presage more domestic terrorism? Does a new president mean politics and government is about to get better? Biden first. Just 14 days after a deadly effort to halt his presidency, he took his oath in a solemn, locked-down Washington, with military security wrapped around the Capitol, the White House and the city, reminiscent of scenes from Latin American dictatorships.

The image was striking. He sought a heart-to-heart connection with America from the same place America watched hand-to-hand combat two weeks before. He now faces national health and economic crises, amid promises of overcoming both with "boldness," and a Congress that is, albeit narrowly, controlled by his own party. Certainly, that means change is coming, right?

Yet the nation, battered by an unrelenting pandemic, frustrated by vaccine distribution woes, still torn by acidic arguments over the 2020 election, remains divided and on edge. The [latest Washington Post/ABC News poll](#) shows confidence in Biden to make the right decisions for the future is split: 49 percent of Americans say they feel confident; 50 percent not so much.

Isn't that roughly where we were before the election, before the riot, even four years ago? It could change, of course, if Biden significantly improves vaccine efforts, and gets major parts of his ambitious agenda through Congress. His odds look better regarding the former. Remember, a 50-50 Senate with a one-vote Democratic edge (thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris) won't help much if Senate rules requiring 60 votes to pass most legislation remain in place.

Getting quick action on pandemic relief seems likely, simply because the need is great. But touted initiatives on issues not tied to the virus or the federal budget, such as immigration, climate change, family leave or raising the hourly minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15, are more likely to meet GOP resistance. (Pennsylvania, [an island of stasis for minimum wage](#) -- every neighbor state has a higher rate -- can keep its \$7.25 level even if Washington hikes the federal rate.)

Still, Biden has promised to "manage the hell out of" vaccine distribution. And it's hard to see the Senate not immediately cooperating on just about anything virus-related. Unless, of course, the Senate decides time is better spent right now on another impeachment trial of Donald Trump. Do two things at once, you say? Have you met your Senate?

Biden used his inaugural address as a call to action and a call for healing, to fight the pandemic “as one nation.” He stressed the need for “unity,” for less partisan anger, for an end to “this uncivil war.” He never mentioned Trump. He sounded hopeful. He seemed sincere. But how will his calls be answered?

As to the events in Washington on Jan. 6, images of a rioting mob seizing America’s (if not the world’s) symbol of democratic government, and the resultant chaos and death, were electric shocks demanding attention. Those images spoke plainly: “Look at us! Is this what you want? This kind of politics? This kind of country? This response to the will of a diverse voting majority? Well, this is what happens when lies permeate public debate. When lies are supported by elected leaders, or tacitly condoned by their silence. When facts of health, science, election results are trashed for political gain. Do you see how ruinous this can be? Can we now, finally, say *enough*?”

No doubt there are Americans unmoved by [the sights and sounds seen and heard around the world on Jan. 6](#). No doubt some reveled in them. But surely, for the majority, the impact was sorrowful, disturbing, unforgettable. Aggressive prosecution of participants should deter similar attacks for now. But the gates of anarchy opened, which means they can do so again. The hurt felt by many watching the Capitol trashed, and the hope felt by many watching the inauguration are sensitivities of the moment.

The lasting impact of these events is unknowable. But whatever changes they may engender can help set the nation’s course at a time critical to the common good, and for our imperfect-but-trying democracy. Let’s hope both are about to improve. — **John Baer’s column in *Harrisburg Patriot-News***

