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Ars Technica

[House Republicans propose nationwide ban on municipal broadband networks](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the peril created by slow internet speeds in rural Pennsylvania, state Sen. Gene Yaw, R-Lycoming County, said Thursday. "COVID-19 actually brought to the forefront broadband and its importance," Yaw, the chairman of the board for the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, said during a hearing on rural broadband.

The Hill

[Tech groups sue Maryland over nation's first online advertising tax](#)

Lack of broadband access creates problems for people of all ages, especially as people have been confined to their homes due to pandemic mitigation efforts, he said. "It's not only telemedicine, it's the ability of students to access programs in light of school closings," he said. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania released a study in 2019 that concluded that internet speeds in rural Pennsylvania were too slow to be considered broadband, even though federal data suggests most of the state has access to high-speed internet.

Next TV

[FCC's Rosenworcel Confirms Action Unlikely on Sec. 230 Petition](#)

Jed Hamberger, superintendent of Oswayo Valley School District, which covers portions of Potter and McKean counties in northcentral Pennsylvania, said that as his district explored whether or how it could offer online classes, they found that broadband access was going to be a huge hurdle. They did an analysis of the internet speeds of families in the school district. In most homes, "we'd be lucky if one kid could" stream video, he said. "Two-thirds of our distinct did not have the high-speed internet they needed to be able to live stream instruction," Hamberger said.

Fierce Video

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An effort led by Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative in North Central Pennsylvania demonstrates a potential solution, Yaw said. The project, funded by \$62.5 million in federal and state dollars, has helped extend high-speed Internet throughout the Oswayo Valley School District and the surrounding area. "In total, we are laying down 2,800 miles of fiber optics that will provide needed communication for our smart grid technologies and ultimately improve electric reliability," said Craig Eccher, president and CEO Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative.

Reuters

[Coming bill would allow U.S. news publishers to team up when negotiating with Facebook, Google](#)

The project has extended 500 miles of cable to 700 customers already, with plans to add 600 more miles this year, extending serving to another 2,000 customers, he said. Eccher said the effort is reminiscent of the way rural electric cooperatives, such as his, were born in the early 20th century, when electric utility companies didn't think it was cost-effective to extend electric service into rural areas of the country. "The similarities between the need for electrification in rural America and the need for broadband access in rural America are striking," he said. "Once again, our rural communities are being left behind by the technological advancement of the day. Once again, for-profit corporations have said that delivering broadband to rural America is impossibly hard." – **CNHI.com**

York Dispatch

[Op-ed: Student access to broadband internet essential to Pa.'s future](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer

In a closed-door session on Friday, the U.S. Supreme Court will discuss if it wants to hear a case on the constitutionality of Pennsylvania's mail-in voting

Malcolm Kenyatta is running for Senate in Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

Editorial: Census delay means mad scramble for legislative redistricting

law. The nine Supreme Court justices, who use private conferences to mull the thousands of cases they're asked to review each year, will consider a petition filed by U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Butler, and other Republicans that asks the court to settle if Pennsylvania and its state Legislature violated the U.S. Constitution when it instituted mail-in voting in 2019.

Though experts note it's extremely unlikely that any one case is chosen for full review by the nation's highest court and that the court had already denied requests for expedited review and an emergency injunction, lawyers for the Republican plaintiffs say their case raises important issues that are relevant far beyond a single election. "The reason it's important is the court should take an interest in whether Pennsylvania's election laws are administered constitutionally or not, and in accordance with the Pennsylvania constitution and with the federal constitution," said Greg Teufel, a lawyer representing Mr. Kelly.

Acknowledging that it's a "1 or 2 percent chance" the court takes their case since so many cases are vying for its attention, Mr. Teufel said he expects the justices to ask the defendants — including the state, Gov. Tom Wolf and former Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar — to file their official response, which they indicated they wouldn't do unless asked by the court.

The Republicans argue that the 2019 expansion to absentee voting in the state — allowing no-excuse mail-in voting — was unconstitutional in that the state constitution mandates in-person voting as a qualification for its electors. States "may not ignore their state constitution's restrictions on the lawmaking power," the Republicans write in their petition, and "[d]oing so in purported exercise of the plenary authority to regulate federal elections, authority delegated by the U.S. Constitution, presents a federal question of great significance and nationwide implication."

Derek Muller, a law professor at the University of Iowa specializing in election law and federal courts, said it will take four justices to vote to grant the petition for the case to be reviewed, and that it's not possible to predict what they'll do and when they'll do it. Most of the time, "they say 'no' and they say it very quickly," he added, noting that it's likely their decision will be known by next week.

Mr. Muller, who has so far been correct in his assessment of what the court will take in relation to election law cases, said it's easy to assume that the issues at hand are moot because the election is over, but that the court could see their potential impact on voters in future elections. "Especially now that the passions are cooled, they might [choose] to provide guidance going into 2022 and 2024 about what states can and can't do and what they should and shouldn't do so they've got plenty of advance notice," Mr. Muller said.

The Supreme Court had rejected an emergency appeal by the Republicans in December, declining to void the results of the Nov. 3 election in Pennsylvania — including President Joe Biden's win — pending consideration of the case. The GOP's request to expedite the case was denied, too.

Rick Hasen, an election law expert at the University of California Irvine, wrote on Twitter that there's a "real chance" the court will want to "resolve issues about the power of state courts to rely on state constitutions in changing state legislature requirements for federal elections." — **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

The censure culture consuming Pennsylvania's Republican Party sets a paradoxical political standard. Vote your conscience? Party officials howl with outrage and demand a meeting to consider censuring Sen. Pat Toomey.

Face death threats for doing your job? Party officials still can't muster a word of support for Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt. Both Republicans offended former President Donald Trump — Toomey for voting to convict him in an impeachment trial, Schmidt for pushing back on Trump's false claims of a stolen election. The GOP once stood for "Grand Old Party." Now it's more like "grovel or perish."

Schmidt on Saturday tweeted at Sen. Mitch McConnell, the minority leader from Kentucky, saying Trump "incited supporters to kill my children and put their 'heads on spikes' because we counted votes cast by eligible voters. They named my children and included my home address in the threats. Please consider when voting your conscience." McConnell tried to have it both ways, voting to acquit Trump while accusing him of being "morally responsible" for the Jan. 6 insurrection. That was an obvious play to keep Trump fans while trying to calm anxious GOP donors. Of course, it blew up in McConnell's face.

Schmidt, in a conversation with Clout and an interview on CNN this week, marveled at how Republicans complain about "cancel culture" — when people lose their jobs or face other consequences for offensive actions or comments — but censure anyone who draws Trump's ire for telling the truth. "I would suggest they censure Republican elected officials who are lying to voters," he said on CNN. Schmidt told Clout that state Republican Party chair Lawrence Tabas, a Philadelphia attorney, and local Republican City Committee chair Martina White, a state representative from Northeast Philly, still haven't said a word to him about the threats he and his family have faced for three months. "It's surprising, a little bit," he said. "But I guess it shouldn't be." Tabas and White did not respond to Clout's requests for comment.

Schmidt recalled one Republican who stood up for him when Trump went on the attack. It was Toomey. Toomey won't seek a third term next year, setting off a stampede of potential candidates eager to embrace or reject Trump's cult of personality. Schmidt, one of just two Republicans holding citywide office, won't seek a fourth term in 2023 but isn't ruling out a future in public life.

Former President Donald Trump in 2018 appointed Christine Toretti, a member of the Republican National Committee from Western Pennsylvania, as ambassador to Malta. But the U.S. Senate never confirmed her for the post. Malta, an island nation of about 450,000 people in the Mediterranean

Sea, 60 miles south of Italy, is slightly smaller than Philadelphia in square miles. Former U.S. Rep. Bob Brady, Philly's Democratic Party chair and longtime friend to both Biden and Saide, endorsed AFSCME's recommendation this week. "I think it's a good idea," Brady said. "Why not. He needs something to do." – **Chris Brennan's "Clout" column in *Philadelphia Daily News***

