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The building blocks for expanded broadband in Crawford County are taking shape. At Wednesday's Crawford County Commissioners meeting, Planning Office Director Zachary Norwood presented the commissioners with a broadband strategy for approval. While there was no discussion at the meeting, Norwood said that was because the commissioners have been very involved with the process and were familiar with the situation.

Currently, Crawford County ranks as one of the lowest counties in the region with only 75% of households having access to internet service that meets the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standard per a September 2020 study by the Pennsylvania General Assembly titled the "Delivery of High-Speed Broadband Services in Underserved Areas." Before broadband can be placed through the county, there must be a plan. This plan would allow Crawford County to "leverage its funding" to attract and encourage broadband projects in areas of the county that are underserved.

The Planning Commission is also asking for a technical advisory committee to be created to help facilitate broadband. "This is a critical step to lay the groundwork to request funding," said Norwood. Once the plan has been accepted, the county can move forward toward getting broadband to those who need it. If it is approved, the county can be competitive in getting funding for these types of projects.

Crawford County Commissioner Eric Henry spoke to The Herald about the plan and also about the timing. Henry said that the county "has been talking about broadband for a long time." When President Joe Biden passed the "American Rescue Plan," Henry and other county officials noticed the amount

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[Fierce Video MoffettNathanson disses Discovery with ratings downgrade to neutral](#)

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[Harrisburg Patriot-News Congressman Lloyd Smucker fined \\$5,000 for breaking security rules at U.S. Capitol](#)

of funding earmarked for rural broadband. The county hopes that with this plan in place, it can get a chunk of that funding.

Henry said that one group that has really gotten behind rural broadband has been the Farmer's Bureau. In rural areas where there are farms and not much internet access, farmers who use locational software to run their tractors have had trouble with the lack of broadband. "Our rural areas are really suffering," said Henry, who is "absolutely excited" at the idea of bringing broadband to the farmers and all Crawford County residents. The commissioners will vote on this request, among others, at the next commissioners meeting on Wednesday, May 26. Crawford County commissioners meetings are held at the Crawford County Courthouse and begin at 9:30 a.m. – ***Titusville Herald***

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill Monday that aims to punish social media companies for their moderation decisions, a move that Silicon Valley immediately criticized and likely sets the stage for potential legal challenges. The legislation would bar Internet companies from suspending political candidates in the run-up to elections. It also would also make it easier for the Florida state attorney general and individuals to bring lawsuits when they think the tech companies have acted unfairly. Legal experts and tech industry trade groups immediately raised concerns about the constitutionality of the law and warned that it gives the government too much power over online speech.

DeSantis, a potential 2024 Republican presidential contender, pushed for the legislation's passage amid conservatives' complaints that tech companies censor them — charges that the companies vehemently deny. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube's decisions to suspend former president Donald Trump's account in the aftermath of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot have only heightened the stakes. "Today, Floridians are being guaranteed protection against the Silicon Valley power grab on speech, thought, and content," DeSantis said in a [tweet](#). "We the people are standing up to tech totalitarianism with the signing of Florida's Big Tech Bill."

DeSantis [first announced](#) his support for the bill shortly after the tech companies' suspended Trump, but the legislation, had it been effect, would not have affected the tech companies since Trump at the time was not an active candidate for office. The law creates fines of \$250,000 per day for banning candidates for statewide office, and \$25,000 for candidates for local office.

The law also includes provisions to protect people who aren't running for office, allowing them to bring lawsuits against the companies if they think they're being inconsistent about content decisions. DeSantis signed the bill at an event at Florida International University in Miami, where he spoke from a lectern with the sign that said "Stop Big Tech Censorship." DeSantis was flanked by other Florida Republicans, as well as James O'Keefe, the founder of Project Veritas, a non-profit organization known for using undercover tactics to expose what it says is liberal bias in the mainstream news media. Twitter earlier this year banned O'Keefe's account, and he has sued the company for defamation.

Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University Law School in California, described the bill as bad policy and warned that some of its provisions are "obviously unconstitutional" because they restrict the editorial discretion of online publishers. He said some aspects of the law also would be preempted by a federal Internet law known as Section 230 that shields Internet companies from lawsuits over posts, photos and other content shared on their services. "I see this bill as purely performative, it was never designed to be law but simply to send a message to voters," Goldman said in an interview.

The Florida legislation, which takes effect July 1, underscores how Republicans are increasingly targeting tech giants in state legislatures, while their ability to take action at the federal level is limited as Democrats control Washington. The Biden administration recently revoked a Trump era executive

order that called on the Federal Communications Commission to rethink the scope of Section 230 and when its liability protections apply.

The Texas Senate has approved legislation similar to Florida's that would prevent large tech companies from blocking or discriminating against a user based on their viewpoint or their location within Texas. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott (R-Texas) [has expressed support](#) for that bill. North Carolina and Louisiana state lawmakers have introduced similar bills. "It's open season on the Internet at the state level," Goldman said.

Washington lawmakers are also debating the future of social media legislation. Members of Congress from both parties have introduced bills taking aim at Section 230, but there's been very little bipartisan agreement about how the law should be changed. Democrats largely think the tech companies aren't doing enough to police the spread of viral falsehoods, hate speech and content inciting violence, while Republicans argue the companies have gone too far.

Kurt Opsahl, the deputy executive director and general counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said the debate over the control of the Internet is critical. But the Florida law fails to address the key problems. "There's a lot to be done with providing more information and transparency," he said in an interview. "It doesn't end up being very helpful to pass an unconstitutional bill that is going to be challenged immediately and likely to never go into effect."

Trade groups representing the tech industry argued that the Florida law could make it harder for tech companies to take down potentially harmful speech from their services. "If this law could somehow be enforced, it would allow lawful but awful user posts including pornography, violence and hate speech that will make it harder for families to safely navigate online," said Carl Szabo, vice president and general counsel at NetChoice, a trade association whose members include Facebook, Google and Twitter.

Tech trade groups also took issue with an exemption Florida lawmakers created for companies that own theme parks, which could apply to websites operated by Disney, whose Disney World is a major Florida tourist attraction, or Comcast, which owns Universal Studios Florida. "If the Florida legislature actually believed that efforts to protect Internet users from harmful content threatened free expression, it wouldn't be excluding digital services that own local theme parks," Matt Schruers, president of the Computer & Communications Industry Association, said in a statement.

State legislatures across the country are increasingly passing legislation to regulate tech giants in the absence of action from Washington. Earlier this year, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) [signed](#) data privacy legislation into law, and Maryland enacted a first-in-the-nation tax on online advertising.

– *Washington Post*

Even show-business marriages have longer honeymoon periods than this. Last Monday's announcement of a [mega-media combination](#) of Discovery Inc. with the WarnerMedia business of AT&T initially thrilled the investors of both companies. Discovery's share price opened the day up 10% on the prospect of the niche cable-content provider suddenly becoming one of the largest Hollywood players. Meanwhile, AT&T's share price jumped nearly 4% on the notion that the telecommunications giant could focus better on its core business without having to also pour capital into a media venture that [was never popular with its own investors](#) anyway.

The warm feelings didn't last. Both stocks soon turned south and closed in the red that day. And Discovery kept falling—losing nearly 12% by the end of the week. The potential merits of the deal haven't changed, but the risks have grown clearer. The complicated transaction will result in a much bigger and much more indebted Discovery, run by its current management but majority owned by AT&T shareholders. And the combined company faces a rapidly changing media landscape with a growing list of competitors. For example, last

week brought several reports that Amazon.com was in takeover discussions with MGM Holdings. The Wall Street Journal reported Monday that [the deal could be announced this week](#).

Discovery's stock had already been on a wild ride due to its part in the [Archegos Capital selloff](#) earlier this year. The pending merger will add some fresh drama. Both Discovery and AT&T have to preserve the value of the WarnerMedia business during a highly uncertain period while awaiting regulatory approvals, which could take a year or more. The New York Times reported that [WarnerMedia Chief Executive Officer Jason Kilar](#) already has hired a legal team to negotiate his departure. Doug Creutz of Cowen noted in a report last week that Twentieth Century Fox saw "pretty serious degradation in performance" while Disney was working to [complete its acquisition](#) of the studio in 2019. "We're not sure that the announcement of \$3B in synergies will be well-received by WarnerMedia employees, either, particularly having just survived a synergy-driven purge associated with the AT&T acquisition," he wrote.

How to integrate the two operations is also a major question hanging over the deal. As the home for the old Warner Bros. studio along with HBO and the Turner media properties, WarnerMedia specializes in broad offerings designed for mass appeal. Discovery has made its name with more niche offerings such as Animal Planet, TLC and the recently acquired Food Network and HGTV. An investor poll by Bernstein Research found a large split on whether the company should combine the HBO Max and Discovery+ services into one offering. Investors in the poll were also the "least confident" in the combined company's ability to achieve the stated goal of \$15 billion in direct-to-consumer revenue by 2023.

In a note to clients Monday, MoffettNathanson analysts wrote that Discovery has "a nice call option on transforming HBO Max into a global juggernaut that trades at a deep discount to Netflix and Disney." But the firm still downgraded the stock to a "neutral" rating, noting that the reward was "outweighed by near-term risks ahead of the deal closing." Discovery's most hair-raising reality show might be the one the company has now cast itself in. – *Wall Street Journal*

