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Portland Oregonian
1 in 4 Oregon school districts have lousy Internet connection, study finds

Wired
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Washington Post
Comcast’s Stream TV service is sparking a controversy over the future of the Internet

tvpredictions.com
MLB's Streaming Plan No Help to Cord-Cutters

USA Today
Google's big cloud move sharpens rivalry with Amazon, Microsoft

New York Times
A Virtual Reality Revolution, Coming to a Headset Near You

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Pittsburgh attorney David Fawcett to run for state attorney general

pennlive.com
AG Kathleen Kane not required to release porn emails, appeals court rules

Next week, the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development will host a conference to discuss how to bring broadband to more Minnesotans. The title of the conference is "Better Together" and will feature Harvard Professor Susan Crawford as keynote speaker. Crawford is one of the nation's biggest advocates of government-owned broadband networks, but her Harvard solutions aren't likely to make things "better" in greater Minnesota. Minnesota elected officials don't have to look any further than their neighbors in Monticello to learn what often happens when folks like Crawford present a false set of promises to consumers regarding municipal broadband.

Last year, New York Law School communications law scholars Charles Davidson and Michael Santorelli reviewed Monticello's government-owned broadband system, FiberNet, and concluded that the city's experience illustrates "the volatile reality of many government-owned networks, or GONs." Specifically, Monticello spends about $2.3 million each year to operate its network but generates just $1.8 million from its approximately 1,300 subscribers. Monticello covers its annual operating deficit by transferring revenue from other city funds. Keep in mind that this annual operating deficit is in addition to the $26.5 million in bonding debt that the city issued to build the network.

This month, the Monticello City Council ordered an audit of FiberNet. Elected officials are concerned about the ongoing operating deficit, and that future operating revenues don't appear to be growing: FiberNet reportedly lost 3.6 percent of its subscribership base in the past year.

This has real consequences for city taxpayers. For example, as Professors Davidson and Santorelli noted, "In July 2012, FiberNet defaulted on its bond repayment because the city was unable to make 'a monthly deposit into a debt service account as required by bond indenture.'" The city also had its bond rating cut because of concerns about persistent operating shortfalls.

Government broadband supporters like Harvard's Crawford argue that these fiscal problems, not unique to Monticello, shouldn't matter. After all, they say, cities aren't expected to make money off their roads or parks. Perhaps that reasoning would work if the city-owned broadband network contributed something that every resident could enjoy. However, with declining subscribership and no concrete evidence that the city-owned network has aided local residents or their economy, it's clear that FiberNet can't and won't live up to expectations. It will continue to be a drain on local taxpayers and the city's budget.

Meanwhile, private broadband providers have contributed to the national, state and Monticello economy. Davidson and Santorelli said in their report last year, "Connection speeds across the country have consistently increased while prices have decreased and the diversity of offerings has multiplied. Wireless broadband has further bolstered intermodal competition and provides Monticello residents with multiple options for getting online."

Furthermore, the existence of government-owned networks puts investment by private Internet Service Providers at risk. Cities, counties and states set the permitting and fee requirements private providers must fulfill before entering a new market. That means that the same government officials in Monticello in charge of FiberNet are also writing the rules that their 17 telecom competitors have to live by.

Finally, when a small community like Monticello builds and operates a poorly functioning broadband network, additional and critical city infrastructure often pays the price. Davidson and Santorelli note, "The financial difficulties facing (Monticello) and FiberNet raise the possibility that the GON will require general revenue expenditure that could be put to better and more productive uses. Infrastructure throughout the state, for example, is poorly rated and in desperate need of investment by state and local government. More than half the roads in the state are of poor or mediocre quality, while its schools have nearly $4 billion in infrastructure funding needs. Billions of dollars in additional funding are needed to shore up other critical infrastructure, like the state's drinking and wastewater systems."

Monticello isn't alone, nor are these failed experiments confined to rural Minnesota. Moorhead's failed public system, "GoMoorhead," was plagued by operational and marketing problems from its inception and was finally sold by the city to a private telecom provider. Memphis, Tenn., taxpayers lost $28 million when their publicly owned broadband network was abandoned and sold also to a private investor.

Access to high-speed broadband is an essential tool in today's economy. To make Minnesota "better" we can agree that we should encourage more investment in this infrastructure, especially in unserved areas in greater Minnesota. Better broadband equals better health care through telemedicine, better public safety and certainly a stronger and better local economy. So while we agree that community access to broadband is a very good thing, it doesn't mean that government ownership is the best way to solve this problem.

In fact, Monticello has shown it's definitely not. – **Op-ed in the *St. Paul (MN) Pioneer-Press* by Annette Thompson Meeks, CEO of the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota**

A new poll of all governors released Friday shows Gov. Wolf with a 50-percent approval rating in Pennsylvania, which is better than findings in last month's Franklin & Marshall College poll but not as good as most of the governors in neighboring states. The new rating is somewhat questionable since the poll, conducted by

Morning Consult, a national technology and media company based in Washington, was taken over a period of months, from May to November. But the sample size in Pennsylvania was significant, close to 4,000 registered voters.

Also, 32 governors have higher approval ratings than Wolf, including Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (69 percent), West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin (62 percent), Ohio Gov. John Kasich, a GOP presidential candidate, (59 percent) and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (58 percent). The only governor in the region polling worse than Wolf is New Jersey's Chris Christie, also a GOP presidential candidate, (40 percent). The highest rated governor is Republican Charlie Baker of Massachusetts (74 percent). The lowest rated is Republican Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback (26 percent). You can read polling results for all governors **right here**.

Wolf's good polling number comes despite an ongoing budget impasse and an **F&M poll last** month that put the Guv's favorable rating at just 38 percent. Also, the poll was conducted prior to Wolf's stated stance in favor of the U.S. accepting Syrian refugees, a stance that **56 percent of Americans** (and, I suspect, Pennsylvanians) disagree with. – ***philly.com***

Two Pittsburgh groups will receive $92,000 in grants from the Comcast Foundation to help fund programs aimed at improving digital literacy and technology education among teenagers. A three-year, $75,000 grant will go to the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh for its Techno Teens program, which exposes black students to “the nitty gritty of technology,” said Urban League vice president Monique McIntosh. The program is expanding into more middle and high schools in Allegheny County next year. Small Seeds Development, a faith-based nonprofit in East Liberty, will receive $17,000 to support its Teen Digital Empowerment Project, which runs a 10-week summer program. – ***Pittsburgh Tribune-Review***

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge on Thursday joined an advisory board created by the daily fantasy sports company FanDuel to help it navigate through an increasingly dense thicket of legal and regulatory challenges. Ridge, who also served as secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, is joined on the FanDuel board by Michael Garcia, former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York; Terdema Ussery, former president and CEO of the Dallas Mavericks; and Tim Brosnan, former Major League Baseball executive vice president of business. Previously, FanDuel asked former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey to lead an internal review of its policies and protocols. Philadelphia-based Comcast Corp. is among the corporate investors in FanDuel. – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

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