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There's been no shortage of commentary over the last few years about the divides between rural and urban Americans on everything from cultural affinities to economic opportunities. And perhaps nothing more vividly underscores the chasm between the two Americas than broadband speeds.

If you live in a city or suburb, the speed of your internet connection should not be a problem, because providers have laid high-quality lines in areas where there are plenty of customers to be had. But there's not as much money to be made placing those lines in rural communities, so many internet users outside metropolitan areas find their speeds to be painfully slow. And the implications are more consequential than frustration while binge-watching "Stranger Things" or "The Crown." Having slow internet connections can be a hindrance to new businesses locating in or thriving in rural areas, putting the livelihood of the countryside at an even greater disadvantage as more and more talent and capital are funneled to cities.

The preliminary findings of a study being undertaken by Penn State University on broadband access in the rural reaches of the commonwealth are not reassuring. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported earlier this month that researchers have found that internet speeds are even slower in rural Pennsylvania than had been previously believed.

The benchmark set by the Federal Communications Commission for high-speed internet is 25 mbps (megabits per second). Penn State's study found this corner of the commonwealth had speeds between 10 and 25 mbps. Sascha Meinrath, the Palmer Chair in Telecommunications at Penn State, told the Inquirer, "What we are documenting is profoundly different than what we were told. The speeds are far slower. Places we were told have access appear to have limited to no access. The important word is 'appear.'"

At least since the dawn of email, policymakers have been grappling with whether the internet is a luxury or a necessity, and it seems fair to say that advocates of the latter are winning the argument. Being able to make headway in a 21st-century economy without a decent internet connection seems unlikely at best. This hasn't escaped the attention of Gov. Tom Wolf, who has offered incentives to internet providers to put high-quality lines in rural areas. State Rep. Pam Snyder, the Greene County Democrat, has also been a firm champion of rural broadband.

"Some very basic things can no longer be done unless you have connectivity," Meinrath said. "The last thing we want to do is have an infrastructure that divides. We've been contacted by a ton of small business owners and farmers who tell me, 'I can't do my work because my connection sucks.'"

It's clear: Having a speedy internet connection is as important in today's world as having passable roads. People in rural areas shouldn't have to settle for broadband connections that are the equivalent of rutted dirt roads while everyone else is zipping down the autobahn. – *Washington (PA) Observer-Reporter editorial*

YouTube plans to make all future original programming available to users for free with advertising, as the video streaming unit of Alphabet Inc's Google seeks a bigger audience for shows and movies that had mostly been restricted to paid subscribers. The shift in strategy means that starting in 2020, a YouTube Premium subscription will no longer be the only way to watch most original programs, with all users having some access.

YouTube's paid option will still remove ads from originals as well as all other videos, and it comes with music streaming privileges. YouTube said earlier on Tuesday that the new strategy will kick in next year, but later noted that though it will apply to content planned in 2019, the actual programming will debut the year after. YouTube has not disclosed the total number of subscribers for the paid offering, launched three years ago, which is available in 29 countries.

It said its move to make programming free was aimed at satisfying growing international user interest in original programming and advertiser demand to associate with special content. The move also gives the company more flexibility in marketing its programs. Some future programming or behind-the-scenes content may remain exclusive to subscribers, if only for a brief time, a person familiar with the thinking said. YouTube Premium costs about \$12 a month in the United States. The dozens of previously released shows and movies in YouTube Premium, such as the first season of popular action comedy "Cobra Kai," will remain behind the paywall, the company said. – **Reuters**

A judge is dismissing an absentee-ballot lawsuit in a state Senate contest in suburban Philadelphia where the six-term Republican incumbent leads a Democratic challenger by about 75 votes. A Bucks County judge on Monday threw out the lawsuit filed by Democrat Tina Davis in a bid to force county officials to count what her lawsuit says are at least 216 absentee ballots received after the legal deadline. The judge's one-page order didn't explain the dismissal, and Davis' campaign says it hasn't decided whether to appeal.

Davis' lawsuit had contended that absentee voters in Pennsylvania can receive a ballot too late to return it before the deadline. Republican Sen. Robert Tomlinson was seeking a seventh four-year term in office in the Nov. 6 election. Davis is a state representative. – **Associated Press**

