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Comcast executive and [longtime Philadelphia political power player](#) David L. Cohen is hoping to join President-elect Joe Biden's administration as either commerce secretary or a high-profile ambassador, according to former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell.

Rendell, a longtime Cohen friend and associate, said he spoke with Cohen about potential administration roles shortly after [Biden defeated President Donald Trump in the Nov. 3 election](#). "He would be terrific. In either post, he would be sensational," Rendell said. Before joining Comcast, Cohen served as chief of staff when Rendell was mayor of Philadelphia.

Federal ethics rules require cabinet members to divest from significant holdings that may pose conflicts of interest or recuse themselves from decisions that could impact those investments. Ambassadorships, however, do not come with such stringent ethics rules. Cohen spokesperson Sena Fitzmaurice said that "any speculation is premature, but of course Mr. Cohen will comply with all ethics requirements."

As of March 10, Cohen owned or controlled more than 3.9 million shares in Comcast, according to Securities and Exchange Commission filings. At Thursday's stock price, that's worth about \$203 million. In 2019, Cohen earned \$20 million in compensation from Comcast, including salary, stock awards, and incentives. Cohen's interest in serving as commerce secretary or as ambassador to the United Kingdom was first reported by [Politico](#). British officials believe he is the front-runner for the latter job, according to Politico, potentially beating out Cindy McCain, the widow of former GOP presidential nominee John McCain.

Rendell said he's unsure of whether Cohen is primarily gunning for the U.K. ambassadorship, as Politico's report indicated. But Rendell said Cohen is interested in an ambassadorship to a country "that is central to U.S. policy," such as Canada or Germany. "He's not looking for the Bahamas," Rendell said.

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Cohen is senior executive vice president at Comcast but is scheduled to limit his role at the Philadelphia-based cable and internet giant starting next month. He has signed an employment agreement with Comcast to serve as senior adviser to CEO Brian L. Roberts from Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2025. Cohen, however, would likely have to leave his role at Comcast if he joins the administration. He is also set to [step down as chairman](#) of the University of Pennsylvania's board of trustees in July. Cohen is also a prolific Democratic fund-raiser and was a significant backer of Biden's presidential run. Cohen hosted a fund-raiser for Biden [on his first official day as a candidate](#), in April 2019, and another in September of last year.
– *Philadelphia Inquirer*

Lack of access to broadband internet is a long-existing issue in many parts of Pennsylvania. The pandemic [has proven](#) how critical it is, as schools have moved online and remote work has become a way of life. "You've seen the Governor's [new orders](#), where they would like people to work at home as much as possible. Well, it's impossible for a lot of people to work at home because they don't have the broadband they need to work at home," said Huntingdon County Commissioner Jeff Thomas.

In May, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law [Act 24](#) of 2020, which provides \$625 million in CARES Act funding from the federal government to counties. Sixty Pennsylvania counties received varying amounts to help small businesses, nonprofits and local governments offset costs accrued because of COVID-19. One thing counties are allowed to spend money on is broadband internet. In Huntingdon County, more than \$1 million has been allocated for two projects to expand high speed internet options.

Commissioner Thomas said the county awarded Upward Broadband and [Rural Broadband Cooperative](#) more than half a million dollars each, to make [fixed wireless broadband](#) available to at least a dozen municipalities by the end of the year. "What's really impressive is these companies didn't start until October," Thomas said. "And to have that amount of work done and that has to be done where customers can call and say, 'Hey, I want on' by December 30. So that's sort of impressive."

Counties are required to use up their CARES Act funding by December 30. Thomas said he would've considered spending even more of the \$4 million Huntingdon received toward broadband if there wasn't a deadline. In Warren County, Commissioner Ben Kafferlin said not being able to meet the deadline requirement is why his county won't be spending any CARES Act dollars on broadband at all. "Originally we had slated \$500,000 to go towards these broadband projects, but the timeline just ended up being impossible," Kafferlin said. The county redistributed that half a million to support businesses and other COVID-19 related expenses.

Kafferlin said the need for broadband is huge in Warren -- an estimated 3,000 students don't have access to support remote learning. The county is looking at other plans to improve its internet, but they take time and money. But his neighboring county, McKean, finds the CARES Act funding a godsend.

McKean County Commissioner Carol Duffy said the county has been laying the groundwork for a broadband improvement project since 2017. The county surveyed internet speeds, identified underserved areas and looked for grants, but funding remained "a huge barrier." "The CARES funding has really been a catalyst to be able to do this for our residents," Duffy said. McKean County is dedicating a third of its CARES Act funds, which is about \$1.2 million, to building six sites that will broadcast wireless signals. Even though the ultimate goal will be to provide access to high speed internet for all residents, Commissioner Tom Kreiner said the current focus is to build at locations where new infrastructure can be established the fastest. "We've got the project divided out into phases [and] areas where we can make the biggest impact," Kreiner said. "And then [we will] continue to grow onto that as well."

The county said the new service is expected to provide at least 25 megabits per second in download speeds. That's significantly faster than its [current median download rate](#) of 4 megabits per second, according to a 2018 study by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. All but one school district in the county will benefit from the upgrade. With this momentum, McKean County is applying for a USDA grant to [expand the work](#) done with the CARES Act funding. Commissioner Cliff Lane said the improved broadband internet supports remote work, online learning and telehealth. "It's something that we felt was going to be almost impossible to do a couple years ago, because of lack of funds," Lane said. "And we've actually come up with a different way to do it with less funds needed to reach more people. Even a couple hundred people with fibre would cost a lot more than \$1.2 million we're looking at doing, so that itself is huge." [Blair](#) and Cambria counties have also allocated CARES Act dollars to expand broadband. Some other counties, like Clinton and Lycoming, are [using funding](#) from sources other than the CARES Act to improve high speed internet access. – **WPSU-FM, University Park**

Due to a surge in COVID-19 cases continuing, the Pennsylvania Capitol Complex will be closed to the public starting on Monday until further notice. Access to the complex will be limited to employees and people with badge keycard credentials to allow operations of the governor's office, state agencies and the General Assembly to continue. That means any events or public gatherings planned in the interior of the Capitol, East Wing, Keystone Building Atrium, Forum Auditorium or The State Museum of Pennsylvania will be cancelled. The Capitol Complex was [closed from mid-March](#) through [late June](#) due to the coronavirus' outbreak. When it did reopen, modified prevention protocols were put in place. Visitors were required to wear a mask to gain entry and adhere to social distancing protocols. Signs indicated limits on the number of people who could ride in an elevator at the same time. Hand sanitizer dispensers were placed throughout the complex.

This closure of the state Capitol comes at a time when the General Assembly is out of session. Its legislative session ended Nov. 30 and is not expected to return to session until Jan. 5 when all 203 House members and 25 senators will be sworn into office for the start of the 2021-22 legislative session. Also on Jan. 19, the swearing-in ceremonies for incoming state Auditor General Tim DeFoor, state Treasurer-elect Stacy Garrity and Attorney General Josh Shapiro are constitutionally required to take place but have not always been held in the Capitol Complex. – **Pennlive**

