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Ferry County in northeastern Washington spans more than 2,200 square miles of mostly forestland, rivers and lakes. And according to the Federal Communications Commission, everyone in the sprawling county has access to broadband internet. But that is not the reality experienced by the roughly 7,500 residents of this county, which is rich in natural beauty but internet-poor.

The county seat, Republic, has basic broadband service, supplied by a community cable TV company owned by residents. But go beyond the cluster of blocks in the small town, and the high-speed service drops off quickly. People routinely drive into town to use Wi-Fi in the public library and other spots for software updates, online shopping or schoolwork, said Elbert Koontz, Republic's mayor. "We don't really have broadband coverage across the county," Mr. Koontz said. "We're out in the woods."

A new study by Microsoft researchers casts a light on the actual use of high-speed internet across the country, and the picture it presents is very different from the F.C.C. numbers. Their analysis, presented at a Microsoft event on Tuesday in Washington, D.C., suggests that the speedy access is much more limited than the F.C.C. data shows. Over all, Microsoft concluded that 162.8 million people do not use the internet at broadband speeds, while the F.C.C. says broadband is not available to 24.7 million Americans. The discrepancy is particularly stark in rural areas. In Ferry County, for example, Microsoft estimates that only 2 percent of people use broadband service, versus the 100 percent the federal government says have access to the service.

Fast internet service is crucial to the modern economy, and closing the digital divide is seen as a step toward shrinking the persistent gaps in

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economic opportunity, educational achievement and health outcomes in America. In some areas with spotty or no service, [children do their homework in Wi-Fi-equipped buses or fast-food restaurants](#), small businesses drive to internet hot spots to send sales pitches and medical records are transported by hand on thumb-drive memory sticks. Accurate measurements on the reach of broadband matter because the government's statistics are used to guide policy and channel federal funding for underserved areas. "It's a huge problem," said Phillip Berenbroick, a telecommunications expert at Public Knowledge, a nonprofit technology policy group. "The result is that we're not getting broadband coverage and funding to areas that really need it."

Telecommunications experts and some politicians have pointed to the shortcomings of the official F.C.C. statistics for years. Last year, the agency began a formal review, still in progress, of how to improve its broadband measurements. "Maintaining updated and accurate data about broadband deployment is critical to bridging the digital divide," Ajit Pai, the commission chairman, said at the time. "So we're teeing up ideas for collecting more granular and standardized data." The Microsoft researchers shared their analysis with F.C.C. officials. The agency declined to comment on the findings.

The issue with the current F.C.C. statistics, experts say, is that they rely on simplistic surveys of internet service providers that inherently overstate coverage. For example, if one business in an area has broadband service, then the entire area is typically considered to have broadband service available. The Microsoft researchers instead looked at the internet speeds of people using the company's software and services, like Office software, Windows updates, Bing searches and maps, and Xbox game play. The Microsoft data is much more detailed than the official government statistics, said John Kahan, Microsoft's chief data analytics officer for external affairs. Microsoft plans to put the national comparisons, as well as state and county data, on a website this month.

The Microsoft analysis also includes county unemployment data, which points to the strong correlation between joblessness and low rates of broadband use. The unemployment rate in Ferry County, for example, is 11 percent, more than twice the statewide rate. "The worst place to be is in a place where there is no access to the technology everyone else is benefiting from," said Brad Smith, president of Microsoft.

Expanding broadband also benefits Microsoft and other tech companies because it enlarges the market for their products and services. And like others, Microsoft is promoting a potential solution. [Microsoft's plan](#) is a mix of old and new technology that involves harnessing the unused channels between television broadcasts, known as white spaces. The technology is sometimes called "super Wi-Fi" because it behaves like regular Wi-Fi but uses low-powered television channels to cover greater distances than wireless hot spots. It is a less expensive alternative to wiring homes, particularly in less-populated and remote regions.

The technology is promising, experts say, but one tool among a handful needed to bring broadband connectivity to rural America. Other tools include fiber networks, satellite coverage and high-speed mobile service. A key challenge is bringing down the cost of devices that use

white-space technology. In mid-2017, they cost \$800, but are now just \$300, Microsoft says. The goal is to get the price to \$100. Last year, Microsoft announced plans to work with internet providers and hardware firms to propel the adoption of white-space technology. To date, the company says, it has deals in 13 states to bring broadband to over a million people in rural areas.

Microsoft on Tuesday said its Airband initiative planned to reach three million rural residents by July 2022, a million more than its target announced last year. Microsoft is urging the government to keep the white-space broadcast spectrum open for public use. It is also pushing to get a larger portion of the more than \$4 billion a year that the F.C.C. and the Agriculture Department spend in grants and subsidies to bring broadband to rural areas.

Microsoft competitors and critics say one of the wealthiest companies in the world is lobbying for an advantage and government money. Broadcasters also worry the white-space technology could interfere with local television service. "Broadcasters have always supported rural broadband deployment," said Dennis Wharton, executive vice president for communications at the National Association of Broadcasters. "But we're skeptical whether Microsoft can deliver that service without significant interference and disruption to local television signals in smaller markets."

In Ferry County, a white-space broadband effort will begin next year. Declaration Networks, a company that focuses on bringing broadband to rural areas, has just received a commitment for money from the F.C.C. for the project. "Ferry County has a lot of needs, and we're going to try address that," said Bob Nichols, chief executive of Declaration Networks, which is based in Vienna, Va. – ***New York Times***

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The campaign arm for Republican congressional candidates fell victim to a cyberattack in April by an unidentified intruder, people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday, fueling concerns that the 2018 election campaign may have been more seriously targeted by hackers than previously known.

The identity of the hacker wasn't clear, but one person familiar with the investigation said it was believed the attack was from a foreign operator. Other people said they couldn't attribute the source of the hack but that it was carried out by a sophisticated actor. The hacker didn't directly breach the network belonging to the National Republican Congressional Committee but instead maliciously accessed confidential committee emails that were being hosted by a third-party cloud-service provider through a password compromise, people familiar with the investigation said.

In a brief statement, a spokesman for the NRCC confirmed that an intrusion had taken place but declined to offer further details, citing an ongoing investigation into the breach. "The NRCC can confirm that it was the victim of a cyber intrusion by an unknown entity," the spokesman said. "The cybersecurity of the Committee's data is paramount, and upon learning of the intrusion, the NRCC immediately launched an internal investigation and notified the FBI, which is now investigating the matter." The Federal Bureau of Investigation declined to comment.

The hack was **first reported by Politico**, which cited unnamed Republican party officials who described it as a major breach that was first detected in April by an outside vendor and exposed thousands of potentially sensitive emails to an outside intruder. A source familiar with the attack said the emails of only a few people at the NRCC were accessed. Another person familiar with the hack said the accounts belonging to four senior staffers were compromised. There is no indication yet that the emails were made public or used maliciously, the person said.

Republican Speaker Paul Ryan, who will retire in January, and other House Republicans weren't made aware of the breach because the NRCC didn't want word of the incident to leak, the person said. A House leadership aide said the top three Republicans in Congress first learned of the hack when a reporter reached out on Monday evening, but declined to comment further.

Some former officials and cybersecurity experts faulted the NRCC for not publicly disclosing the attack. "Not disclosing the hack of their systems endangered the elections," said Brett Bruen, a former national security official in the Obama administration and current president of the Global Situation Room, a crisis communications firm. "The information extracted from this operation could have been of extremely high value for foreign intelligence services," Mr. Bruen said.

The NRCC and its Democratic counterpart, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, began negotiations earlier this year to collectively ban the use of hacked or stolen information in campaigns, in what would have been an unprecedented agreement. But those talks broke down in September when **House Republicans walked away from the process** after accusing Democrats of violating an agreement to not discuss negotiations publicly until a pact was sealed.

Officials in both political parties were on high alert throughout the 2018 campaign season following the hack and disclosure of Democratic emails during the 2016 presidential election, which U.S. intelligence agencies **concluded was part of a foreign interference operation** orchestrated by Russia in an attempt to help President Trump win the election. In that case, Russian hackers broke into the DCCC and leveraged that access to compromise the Democratic National Committee, where they spied on party operatives and stole thousands of confidential emails that were later released publicly.

But Russian trolls and hackers **mostly sat on the sidelines during the 2018 midterm election**. While a limited amount of disinformation was detected, Russia didn't engage in the same widespread campaign intended to disrupt the election, according to U.S. officials and cybersecurity companies looking for evidence of Russian interference. A fuller review by the U.S. intelligence community of election interference is expected to be delivered to the White House later this month, and portions of it may be made public. The U.S.-based cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike has been investigating the latest breach, according to sources familiar with the matter. The firm was hired in 2016 by the DNC to investigate and help manage the alleged Russian hack of its systems. – **Wall Street Journal**

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On Monday, fans of the sitcom “Friends” were in a panic. Netflix had put up a warning that the show would be leaving the service at the end of 2018. Then WarnerMedia, which owns “Friends,” agreed to continue licensing the show to Netflix through 2019. That’s good news for fans. For WarnerMedia, however, it may not have been the wisest move.

WarnerMedia, formerly Time Warner, was acquired this year by AT&T. It is planning to launch a new streaming service in addition to its existing HBO platform. In other words, it’s coming after Netflix. So why let Netflix hold on to such coveted content? “Friends” is among Netflix’s most valuable shows. AT&T may be guarding against risk. The Justice Department is currently appealing AT&T’s acquisition of Time Warner so it isn’t a very good look for AT&T to flex its newfound power over consumers. The licensing deal also gives the company a nice stream of cash at a time when its preparing to launch its new service.

Yet those factors pale in comparison to the strategic benefits of snatching “Friends” away from the streaming giant. As Matthew Ball, a former executive at Amazon Studios, points out, AT&T could have moved “Friends” to HBO, drawing more viewers to sign-up. Or it could have waited to put “Friends” on its new service, starving fans of content and building up anticipation for the platform. AT&T has said that even when “Friends” eventually moves to its service, presumably in 2020, it may stay nonexclusive, meaning “Netflix” could continue to run it. But then why would viewers, who are already on Netflix, bother signing up for the new WarnerMedia platform?

AT&T is trying to enjoy the benefits of licensing its content to Netflix while hatching a plan to compete with it. It can’t succeed in both. As Mr. Ball puts it: “The narrative [that] big media is ready to fight back is just not yet true.” – *Wall Street Journal*

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In observance of the National Day of Mourning to honor and remember former President George H.W. Bush, Gov. Tom Wolf is dismissing non-essential state government employees under his jurisdiction four hours early on Wednesday. Employees will be paid for those missed work hours, said Dan Egan, a spokesman for the governor’s Office of Administration.

The state Treasury as well as auditor general and attorney general’s offices will release their employees four hours early as well. The courts will be open and as of Tuesday evening, so will state legislative offices, according to spokespeople for those legislative branches. Gov. Tom Wolf plans to travel to Washington, D.C. to attend the memorial service for the 41st president, his spokesman J.J. Abbott said. Egan offered this advice to those planning to do business at a state office on Wednesday, “We would advise constituents to call any office or other agency facility to confirm they are open before traveling there.” – *Pennlive*



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