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Much closer to Earth, competition is coming from unlikely places, namely Facebook and Google . Each is exploring ways to deliver Internet access from objects that remain within Earth's atmosphere, including drones and balloons. Google's project Loon aims to deliver Internet to Earth's remote areas through fleets of balloons. Mike Cassidy, who heads project Loon, believes the total cost for Internet from balloons could be 10% or even 1% of Internet from satellites. Google's balloons, of which the company says it can now launch 20 a day, float in a layer of Earth's atmosphere above conventional weather patterns. The high-altitude balloons are, in a way, satellites that don't have to be launched from rockets.

In the stratosphere, about 12 miles above Earth's surface, winds push the balloons east to west or west to east, depending on altitude. In theory, this will allow Google to create a continuous, globe-spanning belt of Internet-delivering balloons at any latitude, though



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it will require thousands of balloons. Mr. Cassidy says that, through the telecom companies Google is teaming up with, he anticipates paying customers to be connecting to its web of balloons by 2016.

While project Loon is using modified versions of the same balloons

that have long been used to study weather, Facebook (and a separate division of Google) are pursuing an even more far-reaching approach. Solar-powered drones the size of Boeing 747s could someday compete with both satellites and balloons to deliver Internet access. "I will say [drones are] really hard," says Yael Maguire, head of Facebook's Connectivity lab. Challenges faced by Mr. Maguire and Titan Aerospace, which is also working on high-altitude drones and was acquired by Google in April, include the need for better solar panels, batteries and autonomous navigation systems, as well as regulators willing to let gigantic pilotless drones share the sky with passenger aircraft.

Other contenders in this race include medium-Earth-orbit satellites, like those launched last week by O3b Networks, which orbit 5,000 miles above Earth. These satellites are large and powerful like their geostationary counterparts, but aren't plagued with the issues of latency. Hedging its bets, perhaps, Google has plans to invest more than \$1 billion in satellites for Internet access. The former CEO of O3b, Greg Wyler, who was briefly at Google, is now collaborating with Elon Musk's SpaceX to create a network of hundreds of low-Earth orbit satellites. Satellites can last decades, but balloons and drones must be constantly replenished, and many more are needed to cover the Earth. On the other hand, the communications equipment in them can be constantly upgraded, says Mr. Maguire.

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Given that the demand for bandwidth is growing at such a rapid pace, Facebook's and Google's ecumenical approach on which technology to use makes sense. It's likely we'll end up in an "all of the above" world, in which distant, powerful satellites provide for streaming media while an assortment of balloons, drones and close-in satellites will provide more responsive Internet.

Satellite Internet is already becoming faster and cheaper at a rate that is "retarding the growth of [ground-based] fiber and microwave systems," says Mr. McGlade. In the U.S., about 1.5 million people get home Internet through a satellite connection, though globally only 0.2% of people in developed countries connected through satellite in 2012. Of course the one advantage terrestrial networks have over wireless ones is sheer bandwidth. Those networks can always lay a new fiber optic line when the existing ones get crowded.

In the meantime, business travelers have this to look forward to: The near future will bring Internet access on planes that's as fast as what we are accustomed to on the ground, says Mr. McGlade. In other words, streaming Netflix at 30,000 feet could be a side benefit of the push to connect the next four billion people to the Internet. — *Wall Street Journal*

A few months ago, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) asked a number of Internet providers to vow that they'd never set up controversial Internet "fast lanes" where some Web sites would get sped up over others. So-called "paid prioritization," he said then, would divide the Internet into haves and have-nots. The ISPs should commit to swearing off such fast lanes, Leahy said. But in their responses, the companies — Comcast, Verizon, AT&T, Time Warner Cable and Charter — didn't give him the promise he was looking for. So now, the Vermont Democrat is calling them out for an "unfortunate" failure to comply. "This is disappointing," Leahy said in a statement Friday. "I was disappointed that some Internet service providers in their responses brushed aside these concerns dismissively."

Although the ISPs told him they didn't *currently* have plans to engage in paid prioritization, they declined to rule out starting such programs in the future, as Leahy asked. Leahy's request was unlikely to ever lead anywhere significant; the whole reason broadband companies are fighting federal regulators on net neutrality is because many would like the freedom to engage in paid prioritization if they wanted to. It wouldn't make sense for them to box themselves into a corner. So the chairman's move was largely symbolic. Still, the ISPs' silence on paid prioritization speaks volumes about their intentions.

Read Leahy's full statement [here](#). Here also are his [initial letters](#) to the Internet providers, and their [responses](#). I've asked the companies involved to comment, and will update if and when they reply. — *Washington Post*

Acknowledging the bruises and distractions caused by an investigation into media leaks by her office, Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane vowed Friday to fight for her seat and her reputation. In one of her first interviews since being questioned in the probe, Kane signaled she might challenge the authority and validity of the special prosecutor appointed to investigate the alleged improper release of grand jury material. "I'm making sure that the process is legal," she said, "and cannot be abused by anyone for any reasons."

A Democrat midway through her first term, Kane also predicted she would not only overcome the court battle, but would also win another term in 2016. "I stand steadfast in that I did nothing wrong," she said, later adding: "I'll make it through my tenure, and I'm confident in my reelection." She spoke during an interview at the Waldorf-Astoria, where elected state officials, lobbyists, and political strategists were gathering for their annual

Pennsylvania Society weekend of wining, dining, and deal-making.

During the same weekend a year ago, Kane was a star attraction - considered at the top of the game and a rising prospect for governor or Senate. But a series of missteps and misstatements this year have dimmed that star. Most serious is the pending investigation into whether her office improperly released grand jury documents - a crime that can carry a prison term - to embarrass political enemies. Last month, the attorney general was called to a courtroom in Norristown and questioned for more than two hours.

The Inquirer has reported that the special prosecutor, Thomas Carluccio, is examining whether Kane's office leaked grand jury information to the Philadelphia Daily News about a 2009 investigation, handled by her Republican predecessors, into the finances of former NAACP head J. Whyatt Mondesire. The Daily News, citing sources, reported that Kane's office was trying to determine why the 2009 investigation did not result in any charges.

The Mondesire inquiry was headed by Frank G. Fina, a former top prosecutor in the Attorney General's Office who now works for Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams. He and Kane have been locked in a public and bitter battle over how past cases were handled by the office. The Montgomery County grand jury is set to expire at the end of year. Carluccio's appointment was authorized by Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille, whose tenure also ends this year. Questions have been raised in some legal circles about whether the court had the authority to appoint a special prosecutor and about the extent of his powers.

In the interview at the Waldorf, Kane appeared calm. She was interrupted more than once by well-wishers who stopped by to express support. This week, she took other steps indicating her intent to fight on. She announced a reorganization atop the office, adding a chief of staff, and plans to hire a new communications director. "Everybody hits bumps in the road," Kane said, "but we are making our team stronger so we can protect Pennsylvania." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*, [also see Pittsburgh Tribune-Review editorial](#)



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