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Internet providers are keeping promises made in advertising about faster download speeds, according to a report from the Federal Communications Commission.



Most of the time, consumers are streaming TV shows and surfing the Web at speeds they are paying for. Sometimes it's even faster depending on the time of day or the geographic location of the home. On the downside, there is an increasing gap between those with access to the fastest cable and fiber-based Internet services and those in rural areas who can only get online via satellite or a phone line. That's why the FCC has been pushing companies to go even further, providing financial incentives to improve their offerings in the most remote parts of the country.

Ads for Internet speeds have spurred both consumer complaints and clashes between providers. In 2011, Verizon Communications and Cablevision Systems

settled a lawsuit over ads that Cablevision claimed misrepresented its speeds. "Faster, better broadband will unleash new innovations and new services to improve the lives of the American people," FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said.

Each time Internet download speeds and quality improved in the past, new businesses moved in, such as Netflix, which has transformed the television market. The FCC study found that cable services typically were the fastest for downloading, thanks to a new standard that marked a technological upgrade for the industry, with top performers Comcast Corp. and Cablevision. Most cable companies now offer download speeds topping 100 megabits per second, five times the rate available just a few years ago.

[Pa. politics: What lies ahead?](#)

[pennlive.com Charlie Gerow column: Looking for a budget fix? Start by not raising our taxes](#)

Fiber Internet access services led by Verizon's FiOS aren't far behind for downloads, and offer higher upload speeds for those who run home offices or send a lot of pictures. DSL, or digital subscriber line, services vary based on the distance between the home and the high-speed hub of the network. These are the most likely to over-promise what they can deliver, and it can be expensive and technologically difficult to upgrade systems, the FCC said.

Satellite providers tend to be conservative when it comes to promises, in part because their services are the slowest. There is an effort by companies like Elon Musk's SpaceX to introduce a new generation of satellites that could provide faster Internet in the next few years. This is the fifth year the FCC has surveyed thousands of households to measure their ability to access information and stream videos over the Internet. The agency uses boxes, similar to those that measure television viewing for ratings purposes, to test what speeds are available, compared with what the consumer paid for. – **Bloomberg**

The FCC appears poised to decide what to do with its proposals for an online public inspection file for radio stations, and for cable and satellite TV systems.

The FCC's list of ["Items on Circulation"](#) (orders that have been written and are being considered for approval by the FCC Commissioners) indicates that the decision has been written and was provided to the Commissioners for their consideration on December 21. That could mean that a decision on this matter is imminent. Items on circulation can be quickly approved, though if they are controversial, they may languish or even disappear. Though rare, there have been times that an order has been drafted and presented to the Commissioners for consideration, but it never sees the light of day.

As we wrote [here](#) and [here](#), the FCC quickly moved this proposal from a Notice of Inquiry to a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking late last year, prompting some to think that the FCC's intent was to get the order out so that it could be implemented in time for the 2016 elections (as one of the drivers of the proposal is online access to political ad buying information).

That may still be the intent, though how quickly the FCC can provide the technology to host the thousands of radio stations that may be subject to any such rule may be a limitation (though the Commission did propose a phased-in approach, requiring larger stations to go online first, perhaps minimizing the Commission's technical burden). Keep your eyes open, as an order on this matter is circulating among the Commissioners, so we may not have long until we see what they decide. – **Broadcast Law Blog**

There is some good news emanating from Harrisburg these days. Unless you happen to be a schoolkid hoping for an extended holiday break. Try not to laugh. We'd snicker, too, if it didn't hurt too much.

Gov. Tom Wolf, who has been engaged in a months-long hissing match with Republican leaders in the Legislature over taxes and a new spending plan, finally relented and freed up emergency funds for state schools and social services. It's a six-month reprieve. So those schools in western Pennsylvania that had been threatening to keep their doors closed after the holiday break will open as expected in January. Sorry, kids. Actually, what we're really sorry about is what passes for governing these days in Harrisburg.

While he was gritting his teeth and relenting on the emergency funding, Wolf continued to bare his fangs on the Republicans who control both the House and Senate. He called the \$30.3 billion no-tax-hike budget that was so unceremoniously plopped on his desk last week "garbage." Wolf promptly took out his pen and made quick work of the Republicans' budget. He vetoed all parts of his except the emergency funds for schools, social services and county governments who have been footing the bill for this version of the Harrisburg follies since the summer.

Then the Democrat took direct aim at Republicans in the Legislature. “In doing this, I’m expressing the outrage that all of us should feel about the garbage the Republican legislative leaders have tried to dump on us,” a clearly agitated Wolf said. “This budget is wrong for Pennsylvania. And our legislators — the folks we elected to serve us — need to own up to this. They need to do their jobs.” Both sides believed they were given a mandate — Wolf to increase education funding and putting the state’s books back on an even keel, Republicans to keep a close eye on the checkbook and avoid tax hikes.

Wolf’s plans for a new tax to be levied on Marcellus Shale proved to be a pipe dream. An increase in the personal income tax was abandoned. Republican leaders actually agreed to a hike in the sales tax, only to see the rank-and-file turn their back on the plan. A new plan to expand what could fall under the sales tax went nowhere. Attempts to address privatization of liquor sales in the state, something much of the public wants, stalled. Efforts to reform one of the most pressing problems in the state, the two badly underfunded state public employee pension plans, also is adrift.

It’s been going on now for six months. And still there is no end in sight. Don’t hold your breath waiting for that to happen.

Rubbing salt into the wound, Republican leaders opted not to even bother to go to work this week. Neither the House nor Senate is in session. House Speaker Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny, said no sessions would be held through the weekend. Representatives will be on a six-hour call starting on Monday. On Wednesday, Wolf sent a letter to both Turzai and Senate Republican leader Joe Scarnati asking them to bring both houses back to the Capitol and continue working on a spending plan.

We’re hoping the governor is not holding his breath. If there is one thing that has become apparent in this six-week standoff, as one compromise deal after another fell through, is that leadership is not exactly a hot commodity in Harrisburg. In the spirit of the season, perhaps those voters who decided on change in the governor’s mansion last year should consider doing the same in the Legislature. And making a New Year’s resolution to seek change and a bipartisan sense of compromise in Harrisburg. It’s called governing. It’s long past time that Harrisburg embraced it. – **Pottstown (Montgomery Co.) Mercury editorial**



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