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The notion of a profound "digital divide" between urban and rural areas in America is hardly new. The real issue is what America should do about it — and whether the government or private sector should take the lead.

Only 2 percent of city dwellers lack broadband access. By contrast, a whopping 35 percent of rural residents — about 23 million people — still do. Many folks in the hinterland still rely on satellite technology. Ethernet cable connections or even radio-powered modems to obtain internet access. The rate of growth in rural areas suffers because many promising small businesses can't meet the connectivity standards of modern consumers. And rural schoolchildren can't get properly wired to keep up with increasingly fast-paced classes, many of them conducted online.

President Trump has already signed two executive orders designed to close the urban-rural digital gap. But it's not enough. Mr. Trump's orders will help private tech companies establish additional infrastructure needed to reach more underserved areas. But the orders don't actually expand rural broadband access. That's because television broadcasters still exercise a near-monopoly on the use of the frequencies and "white spaces" that allow digital signals to reach commercial enterprises and consumer households.

It's up to the Federal Communications Commission, which last revised its regulatory rules in 2015, to start loosening this stranglehold, which is preventing the latest in interactive programming — including telemedicine and remote education — from reaching users in need.

In the short term, the FCC wouldn't need to do all that much. Broadcasters already control 210 MHz of spectrum out of 228 MHz in the TV band. Every full power and Class A station is guaranteed a channel. Which means 18 MHz of spectrum — just 8 percent of the total — could easily be made available for new kinds of digital programming.

One of the FCC's missions is to ensure that use of the spectrum conforms to "public interest, convenience, and necessity." By allowing public broadcasters to dominate the broadband market to such an extreme degree, the FCC is failing to meet its statutory obligation. There are important new

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private sector options that do not impinge upon broadcaster prerogatives. Microsoft, for example, has been a pioneer in the development of Television White Space Technology (TVWST), which exploits the gaps between channels to add badly needed broadband space at a greatly reduced cost. With a new FCC ruling, Microsoft could bring a wave of dynamic providers into the rural broadband market. But don't expect broadcasters to relinquish control — not without a fight.


The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual. ~ Vince Lombardi

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\$350 million in the near future. There is nothing in current TVWST proposals that actually threatens what broadcasters do.

It's important to emphasize that TVWST would not simply benefit Microsoft. The company obtains government authority to provide space for new providers, which could end up including dozens of other firms. TVWST functions much like Wi-Fi, with any prospective user — including non-profits — free to take advantage.

Bipartisan support for Microsoft and TVWST is growing in Congress. Last July, Rep. Kevin Cramer, North Dakota Republican issued a letter to the FCC signed by over 40 other House lawmakers supporting TVWST. Other notable signers included House Republican Conference Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Washington Republican, and Reps. Darrell Issa California Republican, Mark Meadows, North Carolina Republican, Peter Welch, Vermont Democrat, Suzan DelBene, Washington Democrat and Anna Eshoo, California Democrat.

Without FCC support, there is a real danger of losing the capacity to reach rural residents with enhanced digital technology. The level of investment in TVWST will almost certainly decline. While other technologies exist to increase broadband access, none offer the same level of affordability. Through modest deregulation, the FCC has an opportunity to provide relief to so many rural Americans who still find themselves "cyber-disadvantaged." TVWST increases the number of new broadband providers and exploits currently underutilized capability to reach all Americans. It's a step in the right direction. — *Washington Times*

They'll raise the usual objections. Supporting TVWST will pave the way for a "privatization" of the airwaves, they'll charge. And it will harm rural Low-Power Television (LPTV) providers, and interfere with medical devices, threatening patient safety. In fact, the FCC has adopted strong technical rules and power limits to ensure that TV white spaces devices will not interfere with medical devices. These rules include required exclusion zones around the applicable medical facilities.

And the specter of sweeping privatization? Broadcasters fear that once private companies establish even a small foothold, they'll eventually lose their public funding. But this is a complete bogeyman. Currently, broadcasters enjoy roughly \$1.75 billion in government support, which could increase by

In 2012, longtime *Jeopardy!* host Alex Trebek admitted he would have loved to have been one of the questioners at a presidential debate between President Barack Obama and Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney. During the 2018 election cycle, he could get his wish. Sort of. Trebek, a native Canadian who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1998, will moderate a 45-minute debate among Pennsylvania's 2018 gubernatorial candidates as part of the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry's annual dinner Oct. 1 at the Hershey Lodge in Dauphin County.

Invitations will be extended to all the major candidates, including Democratic incumbent Tom Wolf and the winner of a **Republican primary** that includes attorney Laura Ellsworth, businessman Paul Mango and state Sen. Scott Wagner. It's unclear if Libertarian Party candidate Ken Krawchuk will be invited to participate. "Once the primary campaign is over and there is a Republican nominee, we look forward to sitting down and discussing what debates we will jointly participate in and how those debates are organized," Jeffrey Sheridan, Wolf's campaign manager, said in an email. "It is premature at this time, before we even have a Republican opponent, to talk about debates."

Trebek told *The Hill* in 2013 if he were afforded the opportunity to moderate a political debate, he would take a different approach. "I would not let the politicians get away with standard responses," Trebek said. "I would try to pin them down, even though I might look bad doing it."

So what are Trebek's politics? It's hard to say. **During a 2012 discussion with *Politico***, Trebek offered some viewpoints typically ascribed to conservatives, such as the idea that people are relying too much on government and that there is "a sense of 'entitlement' in our society." But on other issues, like climate change and gay rights, Trebek sounds decidedly more liberal. "I consider myself a social liberal and a fiscal conservative," **Trebek said in an email to *Salon* in 2014**. "I would point out that anyone who has ever asked me, or investigated, would know that I am a registered 'Independent,' and I have voted for both Democratic and Republican candidates in the past, and will continue to do so."

In addition to his role as debate moderator, Trebek also will serve as the dinner's keynote speaker, expected to discuss his unprecedented 34-year career as host of the popular quiz show, spanning more than 7,500 episodes. In fact, Trebek holds the Guinness Book of World Records award for "Most game show episodes hosted by the same presenter." Dennis Owens, a news anchor for ABC27 in Harrisburg, will be the master of ceremonies.

Trebek returned to filming episodes of *Jeopardy!* in mid-January after surgery to treat a subdural hematoma — blood clots on the brain — caused by a fall in October. Due to the show's filming schedule, Trebek didn't miss an episode, enabling him ahead of the **Super Bowl** to mock contestants who couldn't provide a single response about the category "Football." "Let's look at the \$1,000 clue, just for the fun of it," joked Trebek, a longtime Redskins fan. — ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

The NCTA and the cable industry have gone from "relentless government assault" to seemingly bottomless regulatory deconstruction in just 21 months. With this probably in mind, the cable industry lobbying org has extended the contract of CEO and President Michael Powell for three more years.

Powell is a former FCC chairman, a Bill Clinton appointee, who joined the NCTA in 2011. He was one of the most vocal proponents of current FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and his quest to strip away 2015 Title II internet regulations. The NCTA credits Powell with guiding its strategic restructuring and rebranding—the organization is now officially known as NCTA—The Internet & Television Association and has aggressively sought to move away from the term "cable."

In 2016, Powell also made the bold decision to end the group's 50-year-old tradeshow. It was at the last NCTA event, branded INTX for its last iteration, that Powell famously bemoaned the last regulatory environment. Declaring that the FCC had launched a "relentless government assault," Powell noted, "The FCC's mantra is competition, competition, competition. But from where we sit it means one thing: regulation, regulation, regulation." — ***Fierce Cable***



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