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Politico

Ajit Pai, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, says the three-page [Save the Internet Act](#) doing the rounds in Congress — a push to reinstate Obama-era protections that treated broadband access as a utility — is a political play. “Most people, I think, accurately view it as more of a political strategy, as opposed to solv[ing] a concrete problem,” Pai said last week at digital skills nonprofit Hopeworks Camden. “I don’t blame them — that’s what politicians in Washington do — but I am focused on what I think American consumers’ primary concern is: getting better, cheaper internet access, and that’s what the FCC’s been focused on so far.”

Pai was in the neighboring New Jersey city on Thursday in a bid to learn about Hopeworks, which connect at-risk youth with tech training. On Friday, he also [took in a tour of makerspace NextFab in Wilmington](#). New Jersey marks the 42nd state Pai has visited on what an aide described as “digital divide trips.” He recounts touring schools in New Mexico’s [Jemez Pueblo](#) which went online through public-private partnerships, and rural New Hampshire towns where wireless infrastructure for 4G LTE connectivity has been installed. “The overall lesson I draw from it is that there’s no one solution to closing the digital divide, we have to think broadly about encouraging all kinds of companies ... to try to have a strong case for deploying broadband,” Pai said. “If we set some good rules of the road in Washington I’m

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convinced the private sector can help connect every American with what I call the digital opportunity.”

Walking across meeting rooms and open desk areas at [Hopeworks' 6,000-square-foot hub, designed to mirror tech company offices](#), Pai asked students about their design work and bonded with them over browser tab anxiety. “It’s inspiring that young people can learn to code ... to take charge of their future,” said Pai. “Students here will be well positioned to get the jobs of the future and ultimately better their own lives and the lives of the community.”

Pai came under fire from activists in 2017 after leading the agency’s rollback of the Title II classification of internet access, a move that Philly’s Media Mobilizing Project said [favored large telecom companies such as Comcast and Verizon](#). Conversely, execs like Comcast’s David Cohen welcomed the rollback at the time, saying Title II rules stifled investment and innovation. “I favor a free and open internet,” Pai said, after meeting with students from the Camden program. “That’s we had prior to 2015. A lot of the hysterical predictions of doom have been demonstrated [to be] false,” said the exec, citing Recode’s report that [broadband speeds across the country were up across the board](#).

Though speeds, per the report, are on the rise, connectivity across the bridge from Camden is going the opposite way. In Philly, the Inquirer reported at the end of last year, large numbers of Philadelphians lack fast internet services in their homes. National broadband penetration rate by household, according to census data, was 83.5 percent, whereas in Philadelphia the rate was 71.6 percent, the second-lowest among the country’s 25 largest cities. (In the Philadelphia area, Comcast’s [discounted internet program Internet Essentials program reaches some 196,000 subscribers](#), a group that includes low-income families, seniors, veterans and residents of public housing.)

Ask Pai how to counter inequities in access to the internet and he’ll point to infrastructure policies supported by the FCC, like [One-Touch Make-Ready](#). “Similar reforms we’ve enacted are already making a mark,” Pai said. “One-Touch Make-Ready enables providers to get quicker access to utility poles. We’re also supporting dig-once policies: If a road is being dug-up, we want broadband providers to gain access to the conduit at the same time in order to string fiber through it. We recognize that it’s not just rural America but many parts of urban America as well that don’t have the kind of access that consumers need.” – *Technical.ly Philly*

Facebook Inc.’s popular Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp apps were inaccessible for millions of users for much of Wednesday and into Thursday. A Facebook status page for developers listed the outage as lasting 11 hours early Thursday on the East Coast, making it one of the longer disruptions of recent years. While internet companies occasionally experience outages caused by problems ranging from natural disasters to surges of web traffic, it is rare for such an established company to go down for so long. The outage could force Facebook to issue refunds to advertisers—many of which use its platforms as a core means of reaching consumers—and further damage a brand already dented by [scandals surrounding privacy and data protection.](#)

Facebook’s woes quickly became top news on Twitter Inc.’s rival network, where the day’s top trending topics included

#FacebookDown. “To all my friends who work as digital marketers/social media specialists: take a day off and have a good rest,” one user posted to Twitter. Facebook’s primary communication about the outage also took place on Twitter. The company didn’t identify a cause, but said it wasn’t related to a **distributed denial-of-service attack**, in which nefarious actors coordinate to bring down a service. “We’re working to resolve the issue as soon as possible,” Facebook said in a tweet. — *Wall Street Journal*

The Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee is seeking special election candidates to fill a recently vacated state Senate seat in a Republican stronghold. State Sen. Richard Alloway II, a Republican, retired in February after a decade of serving the 33rd Senate District, stating he would pursue new opportunities. The special election will be held May 21. The elected representative will finish out Alloway’s term, ending in 2020. Anyone within the district interested in becoming the Democratic nominee should submit an application to the State Party using [an online form](#) by Thursday, March 14. The executive committee of the state party must select a nominee no later than March 30.

The district includes parts of York County, including Hanover, Penn Township and West Manheim Township. It also includes all of Adams County and parts of Cumberland and Franklin Counties. Alloway ran unopposed in the 2016 election. — *York Dispatch*

