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March 30, 2016

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Pitcairn Borough (Allegheny Co.) Council also still is working toward resolving issues related to the borough-owned cable and Internet systems. Council has been discussing whether it is worth it for the borough to keep the systems running or if the costs outweigh the revenue.

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Council President Jack Bova said a representative from the American Cable Association, with which the borough works on negotiations when it comes to the systems, suggested reaching out to a consultant to see what the investment would be to fix the systems or if there are companies interested in buying them. Bova said the consultant would come at no cost. He hoped to have some feedback before the next council meeting on April 11. — *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

Internet access could soon get a whole lot cheaper for low-income Americans.

On Thursday, the Federal Communications Commission will consider a proposal that would **subsidize broadband Internet** for low-income households. If it's adopted, eligible Americans could pay just **\$9.25** a month to get

online. The measure would update the decades-old **Lifeline subsidy**, which provides discounted phone service for poor Americans.

This could be a boon for the estimated **5 million American families** who still lack Internet access. Groups who **support the subsidy** say it will help reverse inequalities in Internet use. But for many poor Americans, getting by in an increasingly digitized world will require more than cheap Internet, experts say. "There's a whole range of other factors that determine whether you benefit or not from Internet access," Blanca Gordo, a senior researcher at the International Computer Science Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, told The Huffington Post.

More than half of low-income Americans with Internet access complain that it's slow, and a quarter say they share a computer with too many other people, according to a **recent**

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study. In addition, some people have no computer access at all. For many poor Americans, a cell phone is their only portal to the Internet, according to Laura Robinson, an assistant professor of sociology at Santa Clara University. That puts them at a serious disadvantage, she said. "Think about typing your resume on a smartphone and trying to get a job with it," Robinson told HuffPost "You can update your linked in page, but can you update your cover letter?"

People with low incomes also tend to lack experience using the Internet, according to Gordo. "We take for granted how much time it has taken for us to learn [how to use the Internet]," Gordo explained. "If you entered this system the '90s, you have developed some awareness of how it functions. But if you're a new entrant, there's a lot to learn."

Without the knowledge that comes from experience, it's difficult for people to develop the confidence and skills needed to use the Internet effectively, Robinson said. Having access without experience is like having car keys but not knowing how to drive, Robertson explained. You might technically be able to get behind the wheel, "but you expend so much emotional energy to operate the vehicle, that you can't look out the window," she said.

I cannot believe that in 2016 we're still wondering if Internet access is a need, when everyday, everywhere you're required to go online. Blanca Gordo, researcher at UC Berkeley. For Robinson, experience and confidence are more important than the quality of one's Internet connection. "If you take someone who is confident [in their ability to use the Internet] and say, 'You have dial-up for the day,' they would say, 'Gee, that sucks,' but they would know how to optimize," Robinson said. For someone who hasn't spent much time on the Internet, she said, "they might do just as badly with all of the resources in the world."

Not being able to use the Internet effectively comes with financial and social costs. Products often cost more in stores than online, and a growing number of basic activities, including applying for jobs and signing up for government services, require people to use the Internet, according to Gordo. "I cannot believe that in 2016 we're still wondering if Internet access is a need, when everyday, everywhere you're required to go online," Gordo said.

The government's proposed broadband subsidy is a necessary step toward greater digital equality, Gordo added. "But this should have happened long ago." Robinson agrees. The stakes are high, she said. "For poor families, it's still 'We can't eat if we're paying for Internet.'" – *Huffington Post*

When AOL Chief Executive Tim Armstrong was in Las Vegas in January for the tech industry's big trade show, he met a parade of ad buyers in the private suites of the Aria and Cosmopolitan hotels. It was his first real chance to pitch the way AOL—fresh off its sale to Verizon Communications Inc.—planned to become a credible threat to Facebook Inc. and Google, the juggernauts of digital advertising. "Data is the oil of the mobile economy," the 45-year-old Mr. Armstrong said at one meeting, according to a person present.

Imagine, he said, if a hotel chain supplied Verizon with a database of its frequent guests. That could be matched up with data on Verizon's more than 100 million wireless customers, plus AOL's own data, to target guests with ads for promotional offers. Later, the hotel's sales data and the telecom giant's customer data could be cross-referenced to see how many of those people subsequently visited the hotel.

AOL won't have that capability until later this year, but it reflects Mr. Armstrong's lofty ambitions. He told the advertisers in Las Vegas that he aims to build the top mobile-media company in the world by 2020, one that reaches two billion users, up from a current 700 million, and generates \$10 billion to \$20 billion in revenue, said a person familiar with the meetings.

That would be quite a feat. AOL brought in about \$2.7 billion last year, according to New

Street Research. And, it hasn't even cracked the top 10 among mobile-ad sellers by market share, according to eMarketer. Mr. Armstrong's empire-building plans would get a boost if Verizon acquired the core business of Yahoo Inc. The Web company has asked potential buyers to submit preliminary bids by April 11. Verizon, with its deep pockets and high hopes for digital advertising, is a leading contender in the auction, say people familiar with the situation.

Buying Yahoo wouldn't exactly catapult Verizon to the top. Yahoo's share of U.S. mobile advertising stands at just 2.4% this year, down from 3.3% in 2014, while Google, a unit of Alphabet Inc., and Facebook command a combined 50% of the \$43.6 billion mobile market, according to eMarketer. Still, Yahoo offers tremendous scale—a billion monthly users overall, including 600 million who use it on mobile devices. "If you are going to take on Facebook and Google, Verizon and AOL make for a nice powerful property," said Robert Peck, managing director and Internet equity analyst at SunTrust Robinson Humphrey. "But you need bigger scale to make you as relevant. Yahoo gets you there."

Verizon's wireless data will be central to those efforts. Already, select AOL clients involved in a "beta" test can tap into data about cellphone users' locations to show if anyone went to a brand's store after seeing an ad. A Verizon-Yahoo combination would thrust Mr. Armstrong into the role of overseer for the combined company's digital media assets, and could leave Yahoo Chief Executive Marissa Mayer out, say people close to the situation. The two executives, colleagues at Google years ago, have each climbed the ranks of the tech industry.

Now, Ms. Mayer is fighting to save her job as Yahoo explores a sale, while Mr. Armstrong helps lead Verizon's push to acquire it. Ms. Mayer's detractors have said that she hasn't developed strong relationships on Madison Avenue. Ad-agency executives give Mr. Armstrong high marks on that front. He once sent his private plane to Denver to pick up an agency executive who had fallen ill while traveling. Yahoo declined to comment.

Media executives generally credit Mr. Armstrong, who became AOL's CEO in 2009, with transforming it from a punchline after the breakup of the AOL-Time Warner merger into a company that Verizon was willing to pay \$4.4 billion for last summer. "Remember, AOL looked like it was in a death spiral," said Wenda Harris Millard, president and chief operating officer of MediaLink, which advises media and ad firms.

During Mr. Armstrong's tenure at AOL, he shifted the company's focus on content—he bought the Huffington Post in 2011 for \$315 million—to a strategy built around advertising technology. Some customers and current and former colleagues criticized him for being erratic and indecisive in the process.

Inside Verizon, Mr. Armstrong has already made an impression. He has been given control of Verizon Digital Media Services, the company's collection of video and advertising businesses, including a mobile-video app called go90. He is a fixture at corporate leadership retreats, though he reports to Marni Walden, Verizon's president of product innovation and new business, and not directly to CEO Lowell McAdam. "Him staying on to lead AOL was critical to us doing the deal," said Jim Gerace, Verizon's chief communications officer.

According to a regulatory filing, Mr. Armstrong will be awarded roughly \$59 million if he stays at Verizon for four years. Some Verizon insiders even consider him among the potential successors to Mr. McAdam. "The only reason I can see him sticking around is if he has an opportunity to run the whole thing," said a former company executive. — **Wall Street Journal**

The Federal Communications Commission is set to begin a series of long-awaited auctions Tuesday designed to shift airwaves from a 20th century technology — television broadcasting — to a bandwidth-hungry 21st century one: mobile broadband. Although it's a

complex and fraught process that will take years to complete, the demand for these airwaves is intense, driven by the explosion in wireless video streaming and data-hungry apps.

So naturally, the auctions are capturing a lot of attention. Yet with far less fanfare, engineers and entrepreneurs have been working on another wireless breakthrough that could benefit consumers sooner by injecting overdue competition into the market for residential Internet access.

The airwaves being auctioned are considered prime wireless real estate because the signals can travel great distances and pass through walls. Those properties allow a carrier to serve a larger area with fewer antennas, cutting costs and speeding deployment. That's why analysts expect at least \$33 billion in bids. Yet the huge sums involved act as a barrier to entry, putting those wavelengths out of reach for many start-ups and smaller players. The airwaves are likely to be snapped up by Verizon Wireless, AT&T and other major spectrum users.

By contrast, the "millimeter wave" frequencies far higher than the ones used by TV broadcasters are considerably less desirable, and so can be leased for a tiny fraction of the price. There's a reason those airwaves are in less demand, though: Data sent in these frequencies don't travel far, cannot penetrate walls, and may lose their way in bad weather. And until recently, the signals would become hopelessly confounded in urban areas, interfering with themselves as they reflected back and forth off solid surfaces.

But as they're wont to do, technologists are finding ways to adapt those higher frequencies to the task. The first applications are being rolled out by small companies in limited areas; for example, Internet service providers in San Francisco are using high-frequency wireless gear from Israel-based Siklu to deliver ultra fast broadband to a limited number of residences, and a new ISP named Starry plans to roll out high-frequency broadband service on a wider scale in Boston this summer. If Starry works as advertised, it could pave the way for many more high-frequency upstarts offering wireless broadband fast and cheap enough to compete with the services that cable and phone companies have been offering at ever-rising monthly prices.

Having more competition in broadband would not only help limit price hikes, but it would also pressure existing broadband providers to upgrade their networks and their customer service. In most communities, consumers have no more than two options for high-speed Internet connections to their homes — the local cable or phone company.

The auctions that begin Tuesday should help mobile companies offer faster data services with more generous monthly allowances, raising the possibility that more consumers will cut their cable modem cord in favor of mobile broadband. But it will take years before the winning bidders will be able to put the spectrum to use. Where new broadband services are popping up now is in the millimeter waves, in frequencies far away from the prime airwaves of TV. — **Reuters**