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We are using our resources to bring you special coverage of the Coronavirus.

Our mission is to be responsive to the needs and interests of the commonwealth and its people, and we are committed to continuing this mission during this challenging time.

PA CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

LIVE Daily, times TBA

PA Department of Health provides a live update on the Coronavirus. Secretary Dr. Levine & Governor Wolf

CORONAVIRUS IMPACT

LIVE M-F, 12 & 8 PM

30-minute update on how the novel Coronavirus is impacting various aspects of life in Pennsylvania

CORONAVIRUS RELATED PROGRAMMING

Added as Recorded

Public affairs programs from around the state covering county updates and Coronavirus-related topics

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NewsClips

April 17, 2020

Reuters

[AT&T investors denied a dial-in as annual meeting goes online](#)

Washington Post

[Governments around the world are trying a new weapon against coronavirus: Your smartphone](#)

New York Times

[Biden Is Losing the Internet. Does That Matter?](#)

Politico

[Facebook to tell millions of users they've seen 'fake'](#)

Today, Gov. Tom Wolf is scheduled to address all Pennsylvanians about his Plan for PA. The announcement is expected to provide additional detail and insight into the administration's strategy as the Commonwealth moves through the COVID-19 crisis and begins to focus on recovery. The governor's address is scheduled to begin at 2:00 p.m. and can be viewed on PCN and the PCN app. Stay updated at pcntv.com/coronavirus.

Westmoreland County planners have extended the deadline for residents to participate in a study of local broadband internet needs until the end of April. The online survey is part of an eight-county assessment of infrastructure needs for the service that has become increasingly relevant as more residents have been routed to the internet for work and school during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. "We have situations now where both parents are working from home and are having video conferences while the kids are home streaming. In some areas, we know there's not enough broadband service," said Brian Lawrence, deputy director of the county's planning department.

news' about coronavirus

New York Times

Bill Gates, at Odds With Trump on Virus, Becomes a Right-Wing Target

Allentown Morning Call

Republican senators want to give business closure decisions to counties; Gov. Wolf says 'no'

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Toomey, picked for Trump's task force, supports reopening parts of economy 'very soon'

Pennlive

'Pennsylvanians need some certainty' on return to normalcy, Gov. Wolf says; but it's unclear when that will happen

Philadelphia Inquirer

The drive to reopen the Pa. economy is part of a national partisan battle

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Editorial: Time for leadership – Legislature should relinquish its reserve fund

The survey is part of a \$100,000 study by the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission that has been ongoing since January. Westmoreland is the largest county participating but so far has had the fewest responses, Lawrence said. Homeowners and businesses are being asked about their internet service and how it is used. Surveys can be accessed through the [Westmoreland County Planning Department website](#). Paper copies of the surveys can be requested by calling the department at 724-830-3772. The goal is to determine what improvements are needed to enhance service.

Better and more reliable internet in the county's rural areas is essential in luring business and industry, said county Commissioner Doug Chew. "Now is the time to address this," he said. "I hear people complaining so they should be filling this out. We cannot accomplish what schools and telemedicine needs us to accomplish if we don't have good internet."

Officials this year said preliminary estimates suggest about 2% of county residents don't have adequate high-speed internet service. Chew said the county can use information from the survey to seek foundation grants to build infrastructure for more robust internet service that can lure broadband providers to enhance local connectivity. "In order to get the big boys to come in, you have to get a backbone," Chew said. "We need to get a fiber optic backbone in place to allow companies to come in and provide service off of our spine." – **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**

It is not as if the high-speed internet inequities plaguing broad swaths of rural Pennsylvania were any secret. Residents have been sharing their struggles and frustrations for years. In Huntingdon County, residents went so far recently as to build themselves a system complete with a mountaintop radio tower, as WHYY.org detailed. Market forces stymie solutions, at least on the scale needed. Without incentives from government, telecommunications companies have long balked at making the sizable investments needed because they just would not pay off.

We can thank the coronavirus for this at least: It has thrown into high relief just how damaging that disparity is for rural communities. As students from more populous, wealthier districts neatly pivoted to online learning after Gov. Tom Wolf ordered school closures to facilitate social distancing, poorer districts, especially those in rural areas, were left scrambling.

Many students did not have school-provided digital devices or the internet access required to use them. As reporter Ed Palattella detailed, some local districts adapted by printing off learning materials. The Fort LeBoeuf School District set up Wi-Fi hot spots in the parking lots of two schools. We credit their resourcefulness. But imagine you are a parent trying to work from home and the inconvenience of building that trek into your daily routine. Each minute counts in the state's jam-packed 180-day window of learning. How could disadvantaged rural students not fall behind under these conditions?

Not much bright news has accompanied the pandemic. But on Tuesday the Federal Communications Commission announced that Armstrong Telecommunications has been awarded \$2.6 million to expand high-speed internet to 2,000 rural households and businesses in Erie, Crawford and Mercer counties, with the bulk of the expansion targeting 1,876 sites in Erie County. The money will be dispersed over 10

years and is part of the ongoing Connection America Fund initiative. The grant mandates that Armstrong install at least 40 percent of the broadband network within the first three years.

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said the agency is helping to bridge the digital divide in rural Pennsylvania and looks forward to finding ways to "continue to make a difference" in those communities. We yearn for a return to "normal" life. But the pandemic has shown that normal was not good enough for too many people.

That includes rural residents left to compete in this high-tech world without the broadband infrastructure so vital to health care, business, education and public safety. The service is not a luxury but an essential utility, akin to electricity and clean water. This FCC investment is welcome, but more is needed in a state where, by the most favorable estimates, hundreds of thousands of people lack access. As we seek ways to increase resiliency post-pandemic, this must rank high on the national agenda. – **Erie Times-News editorial**

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission encouraged consumers across the state, especially those most vulnerable to social isolation, to understand the resources available through the Lifeline program to help them stay connected to their voice and internet services during these challenging times. "Lifeline is intended to help make communications more affordable and more accessible for low-income households, helping them stay connected to information about jobs, family, health care, schools, and emergency services," said PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille. "Because of the recent COVID-19 emergency, more consumers whose incomes have been reduced may now be eligible to qualify for this program."

The PUC is partnering with the Department of Aging and other state agencies and community organizations to increase awareness of Lifeline. "Older Pennsylvanians risk becoming socially isolated during the COVID-19 outbreak. Staying connected and engaged with family and friends is a great opportunity for them to reduce their likelihood of feeling isolated and dealing with related issues like anxiety and depression," said Pennsylvania Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres. "With many older adults living on fixed incomes, programs like Lifeline can help them access technology, whether it's a phone or the internet, that would allow them to keep in touch with loved ones."

Lifeline is a federal government benefit that provides eligible low-income consumers a monthly discount on their phone or internet bill. The benefit can be used for voice (telephone), Broadband Internet Access Service (or BIAS, usually called internet service), or a combined telephone/internet service product from a landline or wireless provider. A consumer qualifies for Lifeline if they are at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines or participate in specific federal programs, including: Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Veterans' Pension and Survivor Benefit, Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Consumers or households that apply for Lifeline will be checked to see if they are eligible. – **Associated Press**

FCC commissioner Brendan Carr told KDKA(AM) Pittsburgh conservative radio show host Wendy Bell Wednesday evening (April 15) that groups like Free Press—he did not name them but made it clear who he was

talking about—"are engaged in a sweeping and dangerous attempt to weaponize the FCC against political actors" it doesn't like.

On April 6, the FCC—in this case comprising the chairman, the general counsel and the Media Bureau chief—flatly, and strongly, rejected a petition by Free Press seeking a government investigation into broadcasters who aired statements by the President during coronavirus briefings and "related commentary." Pai and company argued that the investigation would itself curtail a free press.

Carr pointed out that the group (Free Press) had cited Williams, among others, in the complaint. She said she had drawn fire after her name became public and appreciated Carr for "flagging her" about the complaint. Carr pointed out that "this group" (he again did not call out Free Press by name) had also tried to secure network neutrality rules and succeeded under a Democratic-controlled FCC before the Republican-controlled Ajit Pai FCC, supported by Carr, unwound those rules.

So, said Carr, Free Press was signaling their next move. He said that "when they get the votes here at the FCC, they are going to bring petitions back, just like this one, trying to shut down conservative voices." Carr is not permitted to advocate for the President's reelection, but he said that if Democrats get the majority groups like Free Press would try to shut down conservative voices. He said "the group" wanted the FCC to be "the ministry of truth as the left sees it" and called the petition the tip of the iceberg and a warning shot. He called it a dangerous signal and said people have to "speak up." Bell called that "beyond chilling." — **Broadcasting + Cable**

Former U.S. Rep. Bob Brady's one-man lobbying shop has landed its second and third clients — hometown behemoths Comcast-NBC Universal and Independence Blue Cross. Brady, chairman of Philadelphia's Democratic Party, filed his registration Friday as a lobbyist for Comcast in the U.S. House and Senate, according to Politico. He told Clout Tuesday that he had also landed the Blue Cross account. Brady spent 20 years in the House before announcing in 2018 that he would not seek another term.

Federal regulations require a one-year "cooling off" period for departing members of Congress before they can start lobbying their former colleagues. Brady said he expects to advocate for Comcast on legislation impacting its business, as directed by the company's senior executive vice president David L. Cohen. "Whatever David wants," Brady answered when asked what he expected to be doing. Brady was known in Washington as the "mayor of Capitol Hill," thanks to his time as chairman of the House Administration Committee. He still has close relationships with members of Congress, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Brady picked up his first client, Rivers Casino Philadelphia, last year, thanks in part to his friendship with attorney Richard Sprague, a minority owner in the business. His firm — Robert A. Brady Consulting LLC — lists Sprague's law firm as its address on federal and state forms. Brady said he is negotiating to pick up more clients. "These other guys do it. Why not me?" he said. "I've got enough energy to take care of what I got to do. If I get more, maybe I'll hire some more people." — **Chris Brennan's "Clout" column in Philadelphia Daily News**

Q: On April 8th WTAE-TV broke into their mid-afternoon programming to carry the Wolf/Levine briefing live, whereas KDKA-TV did not. Is that typical, and do the two have different policies on what they cover? I would have thought that for something like that, specific to Pennsylvania, all the major news channels would have broadcast it live as a public service. –Mike, Baldwin Township

Rob: Mike's never faced the wrath of a TV viewer angry that their favorite show was pre-empted. Generally speaking, TV stations try to balance sticking with the regular schedule with what's newsworthy enough to interrupt the regular schedule. Stations with alternate outlets on cable or streaming (KDKA's CBSN Pittsburgh, WPXI's PCNC or WPXI Now) will sometimes carry news conference there as an alternative.

"WTAE Channel 4 is the only Pittsburgh [broadcast] television station that has consistently broadcast daily Coronavirus briefings by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine, as well as weekly briefings by Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and Health Director Dr. Deborah Bogen," said WTAE news director Jim Parsons. "I agree with Mike in Baldwin. Delivering such important local public health information to viewers is a public service that WTAE takes seriously as part of our core responsibility as broadcasters. #wearebroadcasters" KDKA-TV news director Kathy Hostetter said Channel 2 aired state press conference on KDKA at the outset of COVID-19 coverage and after about a week shifted coverage to streamer CBSN Pittsburgh. – **Rob Owen's "TV Q&A" blog in Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**



Stay safe

