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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 28, 2020

New York Times
Europe's Privacy Law Hasn't Shown Its Teeth, Frustrating Advocates

Fox Business
Coronavirus crisis proves 'net neutrality' was a mistake, repeal was right move: Grover Norquist

Government Technology
Internet Use Has Changed, Not Increased, Iowa ISPs Say

Vice
Movie and TV Piracy Sees an 'Unprecedented'

Comcast Xfinity is extending free Wi-Fi hotspots and other offers it put in place in March to help people bring internet to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the company announced Monday.

As of Monday, the commitments to customers has been extended through June 30 "to help ensure students can finish out the school year from home and remind connected to the internet" during the crisis. Along with the free Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspots that were made available at business and outdoor locations across the country, the company has made several other changes including:

- No Disconnects and Waiving Late Fees: Customers of Xfinity Internet, Movie or Voice services will not have their service disconnected and late fees will be waived if the customers contact the company saying they can't pay their bills at this time. Customer Service teams will help with flexible payment plans or other solutions.
- Pausing the company's data plan: The company's data plan of 1TB of data a month is on pause and all customers have unlimited data for no additional charge.
- Internet Essentials: The company's Internet Essentials package currently includes 60 days of complimentary service for new customers through June 30. Internet Essentials is normally available to all qualified low-income households for \$9.95/month.

Spike During Quarantine

Fierce Wireless Dish's network slowly falls into place: analyst

CNBC

GOP Sen. Hawley asks DOJ to open a criminal investigation into Amazon

Chicago Tribune

Trust, familiarity are why national evening news viewership is peaking amid pandemic

The Hill

Scammers pounce as stimulus checks start flowing

Spotlight PA, The Caucus

Pa. senators threaten subpoena if Wolf administration refuses to turn over list of coronavirus business waivers

Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial: Americans deserve the right to vote without endangering their lives

"These extended measures will continue to keep Americans safe and ensure that households are equipped for students to learn and stay informed at home as the nation copes with this unprecedented disruption to our daily lives," said Dave Watson, Comcast Cable Chief Executive Officer. "Our services have never been more important, and we're doing everything we can to keep people connected to the internet." – **Comcast news release; more in Philadelphia Business Journal**

With \$200,000 in state funding, faster internet speeds will be coming to more than 2,000 homes in the region. State Rep. Pam Snyder, D-Jefferson, announced Monday that the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development awarded the money to the Greene County Industrial Development Corp.

With the money, West Virginia-based ClearFiber will begin construction on broadband lines through Washington, Greene and part of Fayette County within the next few months, according to a press release from Snyder's office. ClearFiber is working with KINBER, a nonprofit that assists communities with gaining access to fast, reliable internet. "This announcement has been years in the making, and with the current pandemic, it's shown that affordable, broadband access is a vital necessity for our hospitals, our businesses and our schools," Snyder said in the release. "This public/private partnership will place 65 miles of high-speed fiber optic technology throughout our district, bringing much-needed service to residents who either had no access at all or had unreliable broadband access."

According to the release, the project will begin in Mt. Morris before moving north to Waynesburg, and eventually to Washington. Construction will eventually expand east to California. – **Washington (PA) Observer-Reporter**

The National Cable Television Cooperative (NCTC), which represents more than 750 broadband and cable operators, set a new deal with Kaon Media, a cable box and broadband equipment manufacturer. Under the terms of the agreement, NCTC member operators will receive preferred pricing on the Kaon KSTB2020 managed Android set-top box and voice-enabled remote control. The new agreement also provides member-exclusive benefits including end-to-end device monitoring and management via the KAON Remote Management Solution, guaranteed stock levels, product and user guide customization, tech support and maintenance SLAs, as well as marketing support.

"We are pleased to announce our partnership with Kaon," said Steve Beardslee, senior director of video and technology at NCTC, in a statement. "Many NCTC members continue to deploy app-based streaming video services, and this agreement provides them a cost-effective managed set top box solution that is simple to install, allows customers to easily access their favorite TV shows, and includes management tools within KRMS to ensure a great customer experience."

"We are proud to partner with NCTC to supply our new Android TV set-top box devices to NCTC members. We are sure that the new set-top box will rev up the engagement with subscribers and create value for every member's home entertainment services," said Eric Hybertson, senior vice president of Kaon Media, in a statement. The new agreement is effective immediately and runs through February 16, 2022. NCTC members who want to participate may place orders for Kaon's set-top boxes and voice enabled remote controls through NCTC's online hardware store.

Earlier this year, NCTC set a new agreement that allows its members to buy Amazon Fire TV devices – including the Fire TV Stick, Fire TV Stick 4K, and Fire TV Cube – at a discount, and then offer sell them bundled with pay TV or broadband services to their subscribers. – **Fierce Video**

The digital divide is continuing to close more and more each day, according to the FCC's newly-released broadband deployment report. The FCC claims the number of Americans lacking access to fixed broadband at 25/3Mbps has gone down by more than 14% in 2018. More than 85% now have access to service at 250/25Mbps, a 47% increase since 2017, and the number of rural Americans with access to that level of service more than tripled between 2016 and 2018. The report has been at the center of some controversy as it is based on data the FCC previously collected to create its broadband maps.

"The FCC admits it based its report on faulty data that 'overstates the coverage experienced by some consumers,' Public Knowledge senior policy counsel Jenna Leventoff. . "Overstatements of broadband availability and inaccurate data prevent both Congress and the FCC from enacting policies that ensure unserved areas get the necessary resources to provide broadband access to Americans no matter where they live." – **Cablefax Daily**

Pennsylvania's absentee ballot deadline must be extended during the coronavirus emergency or some voters will be unconstitutionally disenfranchised, a group of nonpartisan advocacy groups said in a lawsuit filed Monday. State law requires mail ballots to be received at county offices by an election day. Instead, those ballots should be counted if they are postmarked by that day and received within the next week, the suit says.

Different voters, through no fault of their own, would have different access to mail-in voting under the current deadlines, the lawsuit says, based on their particular counties' processing of ballots and the speed of mail service. And the only alternative — voting in person — may be disproportionately risky for some.

That, the plaintiffs argue, would violate the state constitution's guarantee that "elections shall be free and equal." "Elections are not 'free' when voters must risk their health and lives to ensure their votes will be counted," the lawsuit says. "And elections are not 'equal' when similarly situated citizens who timely request absentee and mail-in ballots may or may not have their votes counted based on factors outside their control."

The plaintiffs are represented by the Philadelphia-based Public Interest Law Center and Washington-based Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, bringing back together much of the team that in 2018 successfully challenged Pennsylvania's congressional map as an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander. The suit also argues that the deadlines will violate the state constitution's protection of free speech, equal protection for all people, and other provisions.

Under normal conditions, the lawsuit says, the plaintiffs have no quarrel with the absentee ballot deadlines in the law. But during a public health crisis in which voting in person can risk voters' lives, the suit says, the law is unconstitutional. Consider that some counties are already falling behind in processing mail ballot requests, and that mail delivery can be unpredictable, said Mimi McKenzie, legal director of the Public Interest Law Center. That means some voters will likely receive their ballots too late to return, or will return them too late to be counted.

Voters who receive their ballots close to the election day will instead have to go to a polling place if they want to be sure their vote actually counts. "It's putting people in that circumstance of having to choose between having their vote count, which is of course a fundamental right of all American citizens," McKenzie said, "and having to risk their life or the lives of their families and neighbors." And some voters, the plaintiffs argue, could be at greater risk than others. "Because the risks of voting in person during a pandemic vary across the population — along axes like age, race, and disability status — the ability of two similarly situated individuals who have requested mail-in ballots to vote

in person if necessary will differ significantly," the suit says, arguing that "a younger, healthier voter will be more realistically able to remedy the situation by voting in person."

The lawsuit was filed in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which has direct jurisdiction over challenges to the revised voting law that established the absentee ballot deadlines. Its plaintiffs are Suzanne Erb, the chair of the Disability Rights Pennsylvania board; Disability Rights Pennsylvania; the Barristers' Association of Philadelphia; SeniorLAW Center; and Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition. The defendants are officials at the Pennsylvania Department of State, which declined to comment Monday because it does not comment on active litigation. – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

The Pennsylvania Republican Party's summer meeting, set for late May, has been postponed and may be held a month later. That will stretch out what could be a bruising battle for a seat on the Republican National Committee, just as the party is trying to come together to help President Donald Trump win the state again.

Bob Asher, a Montgomery County candy manufacturer, has held one of the two RNC seats in the state since 1998. He may be challenged by Andy Reilly, the former chairman of the Delaware County Republican Party, who took over in 2018 as head of the Southeast Caucus. Asher declares himself as "myopically focused on the reelection of President Trump, Congress, the state Senate and the state House. I will become involved in nothing, or have any comment, that will prove disruptive to that course of action."

Reilly, a Center City lawyer and secretary of the state party, said he is strongly considering a bid. "The next four years will be critically important to the Republican Party," he said. "I'm being encouraged to run by many state committee people from across the state."

A Pennsylvania Republican political consultant, who asked not to be identified in order to speak freely, said state party Chairman Lawrence Tabas of Philadelphia is leaning Reilly's way. Reilly said he has "a good working relationship" with Tabas. Tabas didn't answer directly when asked about Reilly, sending a statement that called interest in the RNC seat a sign of party strength. "I think that's great, and I don't think it would affect the November election because everyone is 100% behind the president," Tabas said. "This is more about the four years that follow."

A wild card in this: the party's 2018 gubernatorial nominee, Scott Wagner of York County. Wagner, who could not stop Gov. Tom Wolf's bid for a second term, holds a serious grudge against Asher, who did not support him in the 2018 primary. Reilly said Wagner told him in November he was running for the seat but might stay out of the contest if Reilly became a candidate. A working theory here: Wagner could be the "hammer" on behalf of Reilly. Wagner didn't respond to Clout's hails.

The other RNC seat has been held since 1997 by Christine Toretti, former owner of a Western Pennsylvania drilling firm, who is seeking another four-year term. Trump appointed Toretti as ambassador to Malta in 2018 but the U.S. Senate did not take action to approve her. Toretti said she is committed to Trump's reelection and said Malta "is not a priority for me right now." She also praised Asher. "He's incredibly loyal and passionate about the Republican Party," she said. "He's been a great person to work with." – **Chris Brennan's "Clout" column in *Philadelphia Daily News***

Stay safe



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