

Cablefax Dashboard

Hero of the Week



Ryan Pitcher, Atlantic Broadband: In the midst of COVID-19 precautions, one Atlantic Broadband employee put the welfare of others first. Pitcher, a 13-year employee and maintenance technician for Maryland/Delaware based out of Middletown, was headed back to his truck from a job at 10:15am on April 1 when he heard a woman screaming on the other side of the cul-de-sac. He turned to see flames leaping from the back of a trailer home. Ryan, who has been a volunteer firefighter for more than 20 years, moved quickly, entered the residence and yelled for everyone to get out. One of the four occupants who is disabled was still in his bed. Ryan got him out of the bed and helped carry him out of the unit. All of this took place before fire engines arrived and before most of us had a second cup of coffee.

This story was posted in today's *Cablefax Daily*.



May 18, 2020

New York Times
[U.S. Is Said to Plan to File Antitrust Charges Against Google](#)

Bloomberg
[Amazon Wants to Innovate Its Way Out of the Pandemic](#)

Variety
[Apple Acquires NextVR, Setting Stage for Bigger Leap Into AR and VR](#)

Los Angeles Times
[Roku, a streaming fixture, gets a lift from home-viewing surge](#)

PCN
[Broadcasting from home: How PCN adjusted to a new way of working](#)

Fox News
[Online church services attacked by hackers using child pornography](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer

Republican U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey says the process of reopening businesses across Pennsylvania is "still going much more slowly than it needs to go," calling for the Lehigh Valley to begin reopening and criticizing the Wolf administration as lacking transparency in its decision-making process. "We really should be moving ahead most everywhere in the state," Toomey told The Morning Call on Friday morning, adding that he'd want to review data from Philadelphia and Delaware County before including areas that tallied some of the highest case counts. "But even there, there's no question in my mind that many businesses can and should be able to be open."

Lehigh and Northampton counties should be among counties now allowed to loosen restrictions that were intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus, Toomey said, citing the assessment from [two infectious disease experts at top Lehigh Valley medical systems](#) as well as "a clear declining trend" in the Valley and "plenty" of hospital capacity. "By all means, Lehigh and Northampton counties should be well along the reopening process," Toomey said,

Toomey's comments came as restrictions on businesses were partially lifted Friday in another 12 counties. That makes for a total of 49 that have moved or will move into the "yellow" phase of reopening, which ends the stay-at-home order and lifts some restrictions on work and social interaction. Gov. Tom Wolf announced the additional 12 counties, including Carbon, can enter that phase next Friday. [Wolf said in a letter to state Sen. Lisa Boscola, D-Northampton, on Friday](#) that he does not believe Lehigh and Northampton counties should not enter the yellow phase yet but that he would meet with infectious disease specialists from the region who have urged for lifting restrictions.

The senator, who [has released his own plan](#) for reopening the state's economy, said those announcements from Wolf have been "progress," but that he believes the reopening process should be accelerated. Speaking ahead of Wolf's announcement Friday, he noted that most of the state's residents live in counties that still have not been allowed to start reopening. Toomey criticized the data-based criteria that the governor has outlined for reopening — a new-case rate of fewer than 50 per 100,000 population over a 14-day period — as

**From 'Can I have your vote?' to 'How can I help?'
Coronavirus has transformed campaigning for the Pa. primary.**

**Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
As restrictions loosen in Pennsylvania, health officials gear up for increased contact tracing**

**Philadelphia Inquirer
A pro-Trump super PAC is stepping up its advertising campaign against Joe Biden in Pennsylvania**

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Editorial: No time for posturing – Wolf, Republicans need to find common ground**

Pennsylvanians have just two more days to register to vote if they'd like to cast a ballot in the state's primary election next month. Voters must register [online](#) by Monday in order to vote on June 2. To be eligible to cast your vote, you must be a Pennsylvania resident, 18 years or older on or before the primary, and a U.S. citizen for at least a month before the primary.

Voters have until May 26 to apply for a mail-in ballot, according to the Department of State. Pennsylvania residents also have the option of applying for a permanent spot on the mail-in voter list. Mail-in or absentee ballots must be returned to the

too high, and said there should be alternative thresholds for counties that have seen few cases. The new-case rate for Lehigh and Northampton counties remains more than twice the figure that Wolf has outlined.

He said Wolf is not providing enough detail on the subjective criteria being used to make decisions, and argued that decisions on whether businesses can open should be based on whether they can ensure the safety of employees and customers. Some of the counties that are in the "yellow" phase already should be allowed to move to the "green" phase, with the fewest restrictions, he said. Wolf and the state's health secretary, Dr. Rachel Levine, have said reopening counties is based on metrics, disease modeling, readiness of hospitals, population density and other factors.

The governor has defended the pace, and at a news conference Friday, he acknowledged the growing frustrations in the still-closed counties, particularly as the weather grows warmer and the lockdown drags on. Wolf said decisions would be made based on recommendations from infectious disease experts studying where the virus is most likely to keep spreading, and that lifting restrictions will require residents to not let up on the precautions they've been taking. "Continued cooperation, a united front against this virus, is going to allow us all to reduce those risk factors. That's what's going to let us get more businesses and activities up and running while we protect human life," Wolf said.

Some Republican-controlled counties have said they will defy Wolf's orders to remain closed, and the governor has responded that he will withhold money from those that do so. Toomey said he viewed the decision by counties and some individual businesses as an "inevitable" response, describing Wolf as "exercising powers that many people never thought he had." "I know he's got a legal rationale, and I acknowledge that," Toomey said. "But this depriving people of their livelihood is a very, very, very serious thing, and I won't be surprised if there's more and more noncompliance in the areas that the governor attempts to continue this."

Toomey said he has spoken with Wolf, most recently late last week, about how he believes the state should be proceeding. His advocacy on the issue has raised eyebrows of political observers, who have viewed his reopening proposal as laying policy groundwork for a potential gubernatorial run in 2022, when Wolf's second term would end. Asked about his future plans Friday, Toomey said he would make a decision about his political future "further down the road." "This exercise has really been all about how we get Pennsylvania moving in the right direction," Toomey said. "It has nothing to do with my future political plans." -- **Allentown Morning Call**

The state Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a lawsuit seeking to force Pennsylvania elections officials to accept absentee or mail-in ballots as long as they are received within a week after the primary or general elections during the pandemic. Disability Rights Pennsylvania, the Senior Law Center and several other parties filed the suit in late April, arguing that postal delays from the pandemic could cause ballots to be received too late to count.

However, the administration of Gov. Tom Wolf had argued against it, saying among other things that it would be unconstitutional because it would give different voters different deadlines. Under a 2019 law, the deadline for county elections offices to receive absentee and mail-in ballots is currently 8 p.m., when polls close, on election day.

Pennsylvania's primary was postponed until June 2 from April 28 because of the pandemic, and many, if not most, votes are expected to be cast by mail. Meanwhile, many counties are making plans to shrink the number of polling locations they would otherwise open because of the pandemic. The state legalized mail-in ballots last fall and they will be used for the first time this year. -- **Associated Press**

state no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Polling places will be open during the primary election in each county — even in those who are currently in the “red” phase of Gov. Tom Wolf’s reopening process. The state is taking extra safety precautions during this election cycle because of the coronavirus.

As a result, 6,000 precinct protection kits will be distributed among polling places. These contain supplies such as masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, equipment wipes and floor-marking tape. The Department of State is asking residents to wear masks when they come out to vote, and practice social distancing. Additional questions can be answered at 1-877-VOTESPA or votesPA.com. - Pennlive

For many small residential broadband operators **struggling to scrape any profit out of pay TV**, it’s still easier to phone it in than cut the cord outright. The number of multichannel video providers that have **left the TV field to focus on broadband** has yet to get out of the dozens, **S&P Global Market Intelligence’s** Kagan research group found when it attempted to track TV-provider exits via ceased copyright filings. “We found that 20 traditional multichannel operators had stopped filing with the Copyright Office between 2016 and the first half of 2019,” emailed Tony Lenoir, a senior research analyst. Kagan saw 18 of them no longer advertising traditional pay TV.

The list Lenoir shared consists of some of the smallest firms in the business, most with names that call out origins as telephone providers and some identified as cooperatives or municipally owned. None seem to have began life as cable operators; that end of the MVPD universe seems more committed to traditional pay TV.

Said Pam Gillies, a spokeswoman for the Washington-based **National Cable Television Cooperative**: “We don’t have many members that are going this path.” (Kagan’s list does not include Google Fiber, another firm outside the usual pay-TV ecosystem; in February, it said it would **dump its own TV service in favor of YouTube TV and FuboTV.**) “I’m surprised it hasn’t happened much more frequently,” said Alan Wolk, co-founder and lead analyst at **TVIRIEV**. “It costs them a lot of money to maintain these services, negotiate the fees, try and put together interfaces.”

The experience of two TV-existing firms may suggest why. Both recounted extensive hand-holding to get customers comfortable with over-the-top TV services. “We put together a marketing and education plan,” said Bill Bottiggi, general manager at **Braintree Electric Light Department**, of that Braintree, Mass., municipally-owned utility’s fall 2019 TV shutdown. “We held educational sessions here at our office where customers would come in.”

BELD had about 2,300 TV-and-internet subscribers and some 300 TV-only subscribers alongside roughly 1,200 internet-only subscribers, Bottiggi said. The company’s initial projections had the company left with only 1,800 internet subscribers—it competes with Comcast and Verizon Fios—but instead it had about 2,400 broadband customers. BELD decided to drop a business line it had offered since 2000 not just due to rising programming costs—“all the revenue that came in from cable TV was really just flowing right back out to programmers,” Bottiggi said—but because of hardware bills coming due. “The vast majority of the equipment was all getting towards end of life,” he said.

At **Oregon Farmers Mutual Telephone Co.**, where pay TV **went off that Oregon, Mo., firm’s menu in 2017**, a purchase by an outside firm with no background in video led to that decision. “We had never really dealt with the TV side of things, and we just we looked at what it would cost to keep it going versus what it was making,” said Tammy Souza, vice president of finance and services at Lewisville, Ark.-based **Townes Telecommunications**.

Souza said Townes went as far as giving Roku sticks to customers. “We knew it was going to hinder some of our customers,” Souza said of this business decision. “In our business office, we set up a TV and basically showed them how to maneuver with the Roku stick.” She didn’t have subscriber numbers to share but said customers have taken it well: “Nobody’s really come back to our business office saying, you know, we hate what you did.” Both BELD and Townes provided this help without any support from the streaming services to which they pointed customers.

Wolk called that a missed opportunity for smaller operators looking to get out of TV: “I’m surprised that they just don’t strike a deal with the various streaming services.” A third small utility faces the same trends of cord cutting and escalating programming costs but won’t toss TV yet. “We are the only operator

in our community of 38,000 people,” said Michael Hale, general manager of [Shrewsbury Electric and Cable Operations](#). “We can’t just exit the video business.”

That utility, owned by the town of Shrewsbury, Mass., still has about 1,100 video-only subscribers out of “14,000 and change” for broadband, Hale said. It’s instead opted to [put TV into maintenance mode](#). ““We replace as little as we have to keep it afloat,” he said. And it’s passing on all programming-cost hikes: “We don’t have margins on the video business.” Ian Olgeirson, an analyst with S&P Global’s Kagan group, said he expects more small providers to consider tossing TV as the coronavirus pandemic continues to eat away at the economy. “We are likely to see an increasing number of small and even mid-sized operators, already struggling with the difficult video business, pushed over the edge by the pandemic’s economic aftermath,” he said in an email.

For those considering that step, Souza, with Townes, warned about the possible federal and state filings involved. “There are a lot of regulatory issues that you have to deal with,” she said. “It might be worth it to reach out to a consultant.” BELD’s Bottiggi emphasized what he called “the educational piece” in coaxing customers to move to OTT: “That was significant, I think, in making customers comfortable that they could switch to a streaming environment.” – *Fierce Video*

Stay safe



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