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More than half a million South Carolinians don't have access to a reliable internet connection — forcing students to drive to parking lots of fast food restaurants to do their homework, making it tough for rural hospitals to treat patients in remote areas and rendering some business opportunities impossible. South Carolina's Jim Clyburn, the third ranking Democrat in the U.S. House, wants to change that — [for his constituents](#) and for the entire country's nearly 19 million residents plagued with the same problem, including 14.5 million who live in rural areas.

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**Philadelphia Daily News**  
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Clyburn insists the best chance for achieving universal rural broadband is to fund it as part of a major, \$2 trillion infrastructure package that some members of Congress want to pass in partnership with President Donald Trump. At that meeting, Clyburn won't have to convince anybody that broadband expansion is important. But he will need to make the case that Congress should front the money to help expand access to the internet to rural communities — a lift that could cost as low as \$40 billion according to some estimates, and as high as \$61 billion according to others.

On principle, Clyburn has full support from congressional Democrats, who see this as a winning campaign issue in the 2020 presidential election after being accused of neglecting rural voters in 2016. Though Clyburn has been the most aggressive advocate — he's formed a task force and launched a social media campaign — the party has all but demanded it be included in an infrastructure bill as a condition of Democratic support.

Republicans, including Trump, also are receptive to the idea. After all, a lack of connectivity limits opportunities for education, commerce, healthcare and farming in rural districts represented by members of both political parties. Nobody disagrees that it's a major problem that has to be fixed, and that fixing it would be politically expedient.

Even the GOP-led Legislature in South Carolina, with the Republican governor's support, tried this year to free up \$2 million in grants to assist under-served areas of the state. "Everybody loves rural broadband," said Marty Newell, the chief operating officer for the Center for Rural Strategies, of politicians. "It's better than eating gingerbread on Election Day."

Politicians also love funding roads, bridges, airports and water systems in their home states and districts, however. These priorities will be competing for funding in any infrastructure bill. "How much they have to allocate, I don't know," conceded the U.S. Senate's second most senior Republican, John Thune of South Dakota, who is an advocate for expanded rural broadband deployment. "I assume most of it will go to transportation-type related activities."

Congress has never allocated the kind of funds rural communities need to be fully equipped with broadband, which tend to be funneled into programs through the Federal Communications Commission or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Still, Democrats are bullish about their chances for getting the money now. "I know we can get it," Clyburn said.

How much money Congress allocates, however, will largely determine what sort of rural broadband technology can be deployed — and there are disagreements about what standard Congress should strive for. One approach involves laying down actual wire lines in the ground. The "gold standard," according to many advocates, is fiber optic cable, which could work well in more remote areas and has the best odds of longevity.

This solution is the most costly. In 2018, a consulting firm that specializes in telecom partnered with an economist to produce a report estimating that rural fiber broadband deployment would cost \$61 billion. That's why some rural broadband advocates are pushing for

Congress to focus on wireless technology, which is less expensive. Clyburn emphasized the priority is getting people internet, period. “People say we need to prepare for 5G,” Clyburn said, referring to the current fastest mode of wireless technology. “I don’t want to get hung up on 5G when we have homes with no G’s. “Some people feel that wireless is not the best way, that the best way is fiber optic,” he continued. “And I agree to that … but we ought not sacrifice good policy on the altar of a perfect policy.”

Clyburn’s flexibility is likely strategic, designed to accommodate fiscal conservatives who are sympathetic to the cause of rural broadband but might not want to commit to the most expensive technology. Republican U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, a fellow South Carolinian, said recently that rural broadband deployment was important to him, describing interactions with emotional parents “crying that their kid has a problem with access to the highest level of education because they don’t have connection.”

However, Scott also suggested he was interested in finding the best, most cost-effective option: “Folks in South Carolina, entrepreneurs, (are) work(ing) on ways to extend to rural America a connectivity, but not through broadband, and maybe even cheaper, so I’m trying to do my homework before coming out and talking about the issue incessantly without being able to present a solution.”

Clyburn could ultimately end up running afoul of industry representatives who say fiber is the only solution Congress should consider. “We need to emphasize that to thrive, rural communities must have access to all-fiber connectivity,” said Lisa Youngers, president and CEO of the Fiber Broadband Association. “In many rural areas, the costs of deployment are so great that all-fiber networks will not be built with government support.” “The cost of the infrastructure is always going to be key, but you’ve got to look at this as a long-term investment,” agreed Shirley Bloomfield, the CEO of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, who plans to come to Capitol Hill soon to brief congressional aides on “why fiber is the best investment.”

Some lawmakers are so convinced about the superiority of fiber they think Congress should express a preference for it in legislation. “The bias should be fiber optic,” said U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, a Democrat who represents the entire state of Vermont, which has many rural areas. “You can indicate the goal here is to have a durable, high speed opportunity for rural America and the advantage of fiber optic is that, as technology improves, rural America will be able to keep up.”

Other members of Congress disagree that lawmakers should take a formal position. “I don’t think it’s for the federal government to decide what’s the best way — whether it’s 5G, whether it’s fiber, whether it’s traditional cable,” said U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., who represents the technology Mecca of Silicon Valley and is working on a separate bill that would spend \$41 billion to connect 98 percent of the country with reliable internet. “I don’t think it’s a one-size-fits-all solution.”

As Congress prepares to debate a national policy, South Carolina advocates are doing what they can to expand broadband in their own state. Clyburn said South Carolina Educational Television was seeking \$50,000 to move its broadcast towers to areas that could increase wireless access in the surrounding area. And in a sign that local

lawmakers are aware of the problem, the State House passed a bill in April that would have allowed service providers to apply for up to \$2 million in grants to expand broadband internet in under-served areas across South Carolina. They will have to pick up the effort again next year, however: the legislative session ended without action in the S.C. Senate.

In the meantime, Keith Oliver — senior vice president of Home Telecom in Moncks Corner and a Rural Broadband Coalition board member — is still waiting for the proverbial silver bullet that will end the uncertainty, in South Carolina and everywhere else. “We need a strong, national policy that confronts the need and encourages the build-out of this infrastructure on a long-term, sustainable basis,” Oliver said. “That’s the sort of vision that’s missing in our nation right now.” — **McClatchy**

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Google Cloud, Alphabet Inc.’s cloud computing unit, is joining forces with data-management company Informatica LLC to help businesses draw more value from their data—part of a continuing push by Google into the enterprise information-technology market. The move, announced Tuesday, will couple Informatica’s data-management and integration tools with Google Cloud services including data-storage platforms and market-analytics tools. Financial terms weren’t disclosed.

The goal is to enable commercial users to more easily leverage massive amounts of data for use in artificial intelligence, machine learning and other advanced digital capabilities designed to glean insights for better business decisions, the tech companies said. Though the tools are already available in Google Cloud, gathering and prepping data to feed into them “has been a bottleneck” for many companies, Informatica Chief Executive Anil Chakravarthy told CIO Journal. “The datasets you need are often all over your enterprise and sometimes in third-party providers,” Mr. Chakravarthy said. “And because enterprises didn’t automate all business functions at the same time, the systems and the datasets are not always the same,” he said.

Informatica, a 25-year-old company, offers cloud-based services for managing data across these diverse systems, which can include multiple cloud services. It was taken private four years ago in a \$5.3 billion buyout deal. Mr. Chakravarthy, a former Symantec Corp. executive, was named chief executive in the months after the deal closed. Since then, the company has sharpened its focus on data-integration software, which allows businesses to extract and process information stored in various programs running on premises or in the cloud—a service Mr. Chakravarthy describes as “data plumbing.” It also has shifted its business model from traditional software sales to recurring cloud-service subscriptions.

Mr. Chakravarthy said Informatica started working with Google about three years ago, when the search giant began to expand its outreach to business customers by investing in emerging digital enterprise capabilities, such as AI and machine learning. Expanding its partnership with Informatica is in line with Google’s broader strategy of driving business to its cloud-based enterprise services, led by data and AI tools, in part by helping chief information officers tackle common digital business issues. Managing data ranks high on that list. “What

we hear a lot is customers talking about ‘Can you help us clean up our data as we move to cloud or use AI tools?’” Thomas Kurian, Google Cloud’s chief executive, told CIO Journal. Mark Beyer, a distinguished vice president at Gartner Inc., said for most companies “data integration is permanent and permanently difficult.”

In a survey last year by credit-reporting firm Experian PLC, roughly 80% of 1,000 workers involved in data management at companies said data has become an integral part of forming business strategies. Yet just over half said the increasing volumes of data are causing headaches, including with key issues like regulatory compliance, the survey found. Francis Lobo, chief technology and product officer at Mr. Cooper, a real-estate lending firm with more than three million customers, said data in the mortgage industry is typically siloed across different teams, making it difficult to use advanced analytics or AI. “We’ve experienced some instances where our business had to wait on insights from our analytics teams due to the difficulty of wrangling this siloed data and applying the right algorithms,” Mr. Lobo said.

To avoid costly delays, he said, the company has adopted a data strategy that relies on a centralized warehouse and data lake, capable of ingesting data quickly and reducing the time of running analytics by half. Milind Wagle, chief information officer of data-center and colocation firm Equinix Inc.—and an Informatica customer—said turning over the task of cleaning up and preparing data to outside tech services frees up a company’s own analytics team to focus on generating higher-quality insights from that data. “There is a lot of energy that enterprises spend on cleaning data, and massaging data, and data preparations,” Mr. Wagle said, adding that he welcomes a stronger partnership between Informatica and Google. “We want to have the well-paid analysts in our company delivering insights focused more on managing and building out the data structures,” he said. –

*Wall Street Journal*



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