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May 30, 2018

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**The Wrap Sinclair Broadcasting Hires Trump White House Alum as New**

When the Paden family bought Stanton (NE) Telephone Co. in 1980, its copper-wire, party-line phone system served most of Stanton County, much as it had for decades. Since then, the Padens have overseen a technological makeover of what is now called Stanton Telecom Inc., most recently a \$6 million, two-year project to bury fiber-optic cable throughout the local network. The upgrade brought high-speed broadband Internet connections to the northeast Nebraska community of about 1,500 and its neighbors, said Robert Paden, vice president and general manager.

But challenges remain for Stanton and other rural phone networks nationwide. A dozen Nebraska telecommunications officials passed that message to Brendan Carr, one of five members of the Federal Communications Commission that oversees federal communications policy and regulations. Carr and U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer visited Stanton Tuesday and heard from the telecom executives, in a polite but pointed discussion held at the VFW Post 3603's hall, that the FCC needs to take action to support rural communities.

Afterward, Carr said rural communities as well as farms and ranches need help to make the transition to next-generation Internet connectivity, whether it's by cutting red tape, increasing federal funding or both. "We need to do our work in D.C. to make sure that broadband and next-gen connectivity is getting out to the farmers and ranchers," Carr said. He was an attorney for the commission and practiced communications law in Washington before being appointed by President Donald Trump last August. Computer-connected equipment used in precision agriculture needs high-speed connections to gather and process the data that can increase farm and ranch efficiency, Carr said. He also visited a Milford feedlot where some cattle are tracked through computer chips.

So far, a primary source of funds for rural phone companies — 75 percent of Stanton Telecom's revenue, Paden said — is from the \$10 billion-a-year federal universal service fund, from fees paid by telephone users nationwide. Many rural telephone companies borrowed money for upgrades based on what was a predictable flow of revenue from the fund, said Mike Becker, CEO of Hartelco of Hartington, Nebraska, one of those at the discussion. "Everything changed in 2016," he said, when the fund's programs were altered. The companies' future revenue became less predictable, potentially endangering their ability to repay loans and to pay for the inevitable future improvements.

Fischer said there is an "imbalance" in the way the funds are allocated. "To see that revenue source diminish and be cut so significantly, that throws the business plan out and hurts the community," she said, including the economically important agriculture sector. Having good broadband infrastructure can attract people and businesses to rural areas, she said. "Not everybody wants to live in the city. Not everybody wants to live in a real small apartment. "It's always good to have Washington come out to Nebraska. ... We need to make a commitment to rural America, and Nebraska is rural America. That's how we are viewed." — ***Omaha World-Herald***

**'Executive  
Political  
Producer'**

**Associated  
Press**

**Wagner floats  
debate tour to  
all 67 Pa.  
counties; Wolf  
doesn't bite**

**Lancaster  
Intelligencer  
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Leaders in  
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General  
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wisely move  
toward opening  
primary  
elections**

California this week could take a step closer to having its own net neutrality rules. The state Senate is expected to vote this week on a bill by State Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, which is being touted as the most comprehensive state net neutrality bill in the nation. The Federal Communications Commission voted to repeal Obama-era federal rules protecting net neutrality — the principle that all internet traffic should be treated equally — in December.

The U.S. Senate voted to overturn the FCC's repeal this month, but the effort faces an uphill battle in the House and would have to be approved by President Trump. Trump named Ajit Pai, who led the repeal of the Open Internet Rules, to the chairman position at the FCC. "Tragically, after decades of work (on net neutrality)... Donald Trump comes into office and his FCC wipes everything away," Wiener said during a press conference at the Capitol in Sacramento Tuesday, where he was joined by one of the bill's co-authors, State Sen. Bill Dodd, D-Napa, and representatives from various advocacy groups that support SB 822.

Wiener's bill prohibits internet service providers from blocking or throttling internet traffic, and takes aim at "zero rating," in which internet providers exempt certain content, sites and services from data caps. The bill cleared the Senate Appropriations Committee last Friday and must be voted on by this Friday. SB 822 is supported by former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler (who drafted the rules that this FCC overturned), California State Attorney General Xavier Becerra, the mayors of California's biggest cities, plus dozens of public advocacy groups.

Mitch Steiger, of the California Labor Federation, said net neutrality is important for workers. "When the FCC repealed those net neutrality rules, it was very much a direct attack on (online) forums to organize," Steiger said during the press conference. He provided an example: Researchers found that in 2005, Canadian telecom company Telus blocked server access to a site its workers were using to organize. SB 822 is opposed by the broadband, cable and telecom industries, plus the state's Chamber of Commerce.

AT&T, Comcast and two major industry trade groups reported spending nearly \$1 million on lobbying in Sacramento in the first three months of the year alone — including against SB 822 — according to documents filed with the California Secretary of State. A Comcast spokeswoman said Tuesday the company would have no comment about SB 822, but pointed to Comcast's previous statements that it does not block, slow or discriminate against internet content.

Ernesto Falcon, legislative counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said proponents of the bill — artists, writers and community activists — planned to visit 100 legislative offices Tuesday to urge lawmakers to support SB 822. "For at least one day we will match the ISP contract lobby numbers," he said.

But Falcon said he was optimistic that public opinion would prevail, noting that a national online poll conducted by the University of Maryland in March found that 86 percent opposed the repeal of net neutrality rules. "Whether you're a Republican or a Democrat or an independent, you're basically on the same side," Falcon said. "No amount of money in the world will stop that type of lopsided opinion. I like my odds in getting this bill through the Senate and getting it through the Assembly later this year."

Other states that have passed or have their own net neutrality bills in progress include Washington, Montana and Rhode Island. Also, a New York state senator has introduced a bill similar to California's in New York. — **San Jose (CA) Mercury News**

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Roseanne" reruns are cancelled, too. Viacom is pulling the original version of the sitcom from its cable networks after star and creator Roseanne Barr went on a racist Twitter rant Tuesday, **according to Deadline.com**. As of Wednesday, the show will be scrubbed from schedules on Paramount Network, TV Land and CMT. ABC **canceled its revival of the show** when Barr compared former Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett to an ape and accused Jewish billionaire George Soros of being a "Nazi" who "turned in his fellow Jews." — **New York Post**