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A solid and fast internet connection is becoming increasingly important to maintaining a successful business and that could be damaging to entrepreneurs in rural Pennsylvania, said Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce President Bob Garrett.

"Businesses are shifting. It doesn't matter if it is a family farm or a factory with over 1,000 workers, the internet is where business is done," Garrett said Wednesday during a Government Affairs meeting hosted by the Chamber. Accessibility to high speed internet has become such a concern among local business owners, the issue has become a priority for the Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce.

According to the most recent Broadband Progress Report issued by the FCC, 39 percent of the rural population — 23.3 Americans — lack adequate internet access. By contrast, only 4 percent of urban Americans lack access. High speed internet access can decide if a small business in downtown Selinsgrove can be competitive with a small business in Philadelphia as well as stay in the area, Garrett noted.

Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce Chairman John Uehling said, "I would say 90 percent of us don't know much about it, we just want to use it." The Chamber of Commerce has been working with local and state leaders to address the issue. The organization aims to increase internet speeds in more urbanized areas and expand access in underserved communities.

During the Chamber's meeting on Wednesday, SECTV's (and BCAP Board of Directors member) Sam Haulman and PenTeleData's Al Quimby discussed and answered questions about broadband and high-speed internet in the Valley. "The Chamber works as an advocacy organization, so it is good to hear from the community," said Uehling.

Garrett said the next step is to talk with national leaders from Pennsylvania about the issue. He said the Chamber has invited U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., to discuss both internet access and health issues for those who worked in the coal industry. "Casey's taken the lead with the FCC," Garrett said, adding that he has written a letter to the FCC chairman urging the commission to retain Connect America Phase II funds to help internet providers expand services in rural areas.

"We're just making sure the Senator knows about the issues for small businesses in rural areas." Garrett added that the meeting date with Casey has yet to be finalized but, "we're on his schedule." – *Sunbury Daily Item*

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Verizon boss Lowell McAdam, his company facing slowing sales of mobile phones, made a proposal to acquire cable-TV giant Charter Communications in recent months, three sources told The

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Post. The offer — valued at between \$350 and \$400 a share, and well over \$100 billion, according to two of the sources familiar with the move — was rejected by Liberty Media-controlled Charter because it was too low — and because Charter was not ready to sell.

Verizon, whose archrival AT&T has moved to expand beyond the wireless world by **buying DirecTV** and Time Warner, also recently expressed interest in another Liberty Media property, Sirius XM Holdings, sources said. Verizon's interest in SiriusXM didn't get as far as a bid, the sources said.

Also standing in the way of Liberty Media agreeing to a deal for any of its units is the tax implications, which would be unpalatable to its billionaire chairman John Malone, sources said. Malone is famous for avoiding taxes in big transactions. In addition, Malone wants to give New York-based Charter some time to complete the integration of its **acquisition of Time Warner Cable**, sources said.

Charter's stock has been on a tear since Liberty took a stake in the firm in March 2013 and drafted former Cablevision chief operating officer Tom Rutledge as the boss. The shares have soared roughly 262 percent through Wednesday's close at \$345.55, up 2 percent on the day.

Verizon, whose **interest in acquiring a cable giant like Charter or Comcast was reported by The Post in January**, is scrambling to grow its scale in a rapidly consolidating sector. As growth at the wireless giant's phone business stalls, it has been looking to advance its online advertising business by focusing on phone-obsessed millennials.

Verizon will close on its acquisition of Yahoo next month and is planning to merge its operations with AOL under Tim Armstrong. Still, CEO McAdam needs something more transformative now that he's facing off against rival AT&T and its proposed \$85 billion get-together with Time Warner. Verizon is eyeing a big cable acquisition to help it launch its high-speed 5G wireless plans, which require the kind of fiber-optic networks operated by cable.

Meanwhile, an agreement Verizon cut years ago to lease wireless spectrum to the cable industry for mobile-phone services may soon come back to haunt it. Earlier this month, Charter and Comcast signed a deal to work together to launch their own wireless phone plans. Some sources also speculate that the odd coupling of archrivals Charter and Comcast is meant to prod Verizon into a high-priced cable acquisition that would boost cable stocks as well as create a viable competitor to AT&T and Time Warner.

Back in December, McAdam said that a get-together with Charter made "industrial sense." Verizon's name crops up frequently in conjunction with properties for sale and some suggest it also would be a good fit with online radio giant Pandora. Verizon shares added 1 percent Wednesday to close at \$46.64. Verizon declined comment. — ***New York Post***

