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In May, Kara Burke and Tom Cairns thought they had found their ideal house: a nicely-updated older three-bedroom home in Worthington, Mass. But they didn't make an offer because it didn't have high speed Internet. "We wouldn't choose a house that didn't have electricity," Ms. Burke, 26 years old, said as she explained why. "It's right on par with those things."

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As the Internet becomes central to the way Americans work and live, the digital divide is taking on greater economic significance. Students without Internet access at home may struggle to keep up with school assignments. Towns with less access find themselves falling behind economically, researchers say. Now, the availability of speedy Internet service is starting to affect Americans' biggest purchase: their homes.

Real-estate agents across the country say more buyers like Ms. Burke and Mr. Cairns are turning their noses up at homes without fast Web access. Some studies suggest those buyers are having a keen effect on home prices. A nationwide study released on Monday by researchers at the University of Colorado and Carnegie Mellon University finds fiber-optic connections, the fastest type of high speed Internet available, can add \$5,437 to the price of a \$175,000 home—about as much as a fireplace, or half the value of a bathroom.

David Mans, a real-estate agent outside Boulder, Colo., said after he started noting in his online listings whether properties had Internet availability, he got fewer calls about properties that didn't have it. "I have situations where people won't even

look at it if it doesn't have broadband," Mr. Mans said. What people want in a home can vary a lot, and values can depend heavily on broader market forces. But real estate professionals say there are certain features that can be a deciding factor—like an extra bathroom or pool. And broadband is starting to figure into that same calculus.

Telecom companies by law are required to make telephone service available to every residence in their service areas, but the same isn't true for all high speed Internet providers. Phone lines can deliver DSL service, typically slower than 10 megabits a second. Satellite service is usually even slower. Fiber and some cable can deliver speeds of up to 1,000 megabits a second. University of Colorado researchers compared more than 520,000 home sales between 2011 and 2013 against government data on the type of Internet access available. It built on a 2013 study by the same researchers that found a similar effect on home prices in New York state. The researchers expanded their study with funding from The Fiber to the Home Council Americas, a group made up of municipalities, small telecom companies, and others like Google Inc. that support the expansion of fiber networks.

The results mirrored the findings of a 2014 study by the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater that found access to the Internet could add \$11,815 to the value of a \$439,000 vacation house in Door County, Wis. The impact is most acute in rural areas, where Internet speeds tend to drop dramatically. As of 2013, 92% of urban areas had high speed Internet, compared with 47% of rural areas, according to the most recent data from the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC defines high speed as 25 megabits per second or more.

John Wilczak was getting wireless high speed Internet via Verizon's cell towers at his home in Santa Ynez, Calif., a town of about 4,400 near Santa Barbara. Cable and phone companies sell high speed Internet downtown, but they hadn't built along his street. Mr. Wilczak's Verizon service worked like a cellphone plan. Once when friends brought their children for a week-long visit, the children blew past his 50 gigabyte monthly cap and he was hit with a more than \$900 bill. Mr. Wilczak recently moved to a new house and dropped Verizon in favor of a local wireless Internet company without data caps. He said at least half of the 40 people who considered buying his old house weren't interested in part because it lacked reliable Internet

Unreliable Internet almost derailed Adam Frost's online business selling wooden toys made in European workshops. Mr. Frost tried using satellite Internet when he first moved to New Salem, Mass., about seven years ago from a New York City suburb, where he was paying about \$60 a month for high speed Internet. "We were told there was adequate Internet access when we got up here, and then discovered there really isn't," Mr. Frost said. The satellite service would go down during bad weather, and he consistently went over his monthly data limit.

Mr. Frost decided to pay Verizon \$600 a month to install a dedicated copper wire to his house for more reliable service. But it still isn't fast enough, especially as online services grow more data intensive. Last year it took him 24 hours to download a software update for his computer, and just as the download was nearly finished, his connection crashed and he had to start all over. In Western Massachusetts, where Mr. Frost lives, local officials are trying to solve the problem by building their own high speed networks. To accomplish that they're borrowing a tactic developed a century ago when the region was struggling to gain access to electricity. More than 40 towns have formed a cooperative of Municipal Lighting Plants, a type of public utility first invented to build electricity infrastructure, and are raising funds to build out fiber connections.

Monica Webb is the chairwoman of the cooperative, called WiredWest. So far this year, 19 of those towns have passed bond measures to fund construction. More than 40% of residents in 14 of those towns have already paid a deposit for service. "Some might call us a coalition of the desperate," Ms. Webb said. "We're already feeling the negative impacts of not having adequate broadband." Ms. Burke and Mr. Cairns, who passed on the yellow three-bedroom house in May, decided not to make any offers until they see which towns commit to the project. "After we looked at I think maybe 10 houses we were like, 'It doesn't really matter. We can't pick a house because we don't know which towns are doing this,'" Ms. Burke said. "The towns that don't pass it we absolutely will rule out. It's not a question." – *Wall Street Journal*

Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey is airing his first television ad of the 2016 Senate race. [The 30-second spot](#), which hits the airwaves in Pittsburgh today, is focused on the same theme as [a web ad released by his campaign in May](#). It touts the freshman Republican senator's efforts to beef up background checks for school employees.

So far, those efforts have been unsuccessful. Toomey pressed for a vote last year on his proposal, going so far as to place a hold on a child care bill in an attempt to link the two measures. He could get another shot as Congress debates revisions to the No Child Left Behind education law.

The ad features comments from Kristen Pfautz Woolley, a survivor of child sex abuse and founder of Turning Point Women's Counseling and Advocacy Center in York. She praises Toomey's work on the issue of sexual abuse against children. "There is an epidemic of child abuse and assault in schools, and Senator Toomey is determined to stop it. This ad helps let Pennsylvanians know about the upcoming battle in the Senate, and hopefully will get more of them involved in the fight to protect our children," Toomey's campaign spokesman Steve Kelly said in a statement.

The legislation from Toomey and West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin would require periodic checks on employees and also would ban school districts from hiring any employee convicted of homicide, child abuse, or other crimes, including child pornography, spousal abuse, sexual crimes or kidnapping. School officials also would be prevented from transferring or helping transfer an employee they know or reasonably suspect has engaged in sexual misconduct with a student. Senators from both sides of the aisle have sought tweaks to the bill.

Toomey's campaign declined to comment on how long the TV spot will be running in the Pittsburgh media market. They also did not say how much they spent on the ad buy, describing it only as "a substantial effort." Today is the final day of fundraising for the quarter, though candidates will not file their disclosure reports until mid-July. Toomey ended last quarter with a significant advantage in his campaign accounts: he had more than \$7 million to Democrat Joe Sestak's \$1.7 million. Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski, who entered the race in April, has not yet had to file a fundraising report. – **Allentown Morning Call**

This time, the numbers add up for WPXI-TV (Pittsburgh). As of today, the local NBC affiliate will take over the nightly broadcast of Pennsylvania Lottery results; WTAE had been airing them. "July 1st will be an exciting day for WPXI and the Lottery. We've gone through many rehearsals of the technical processes at play, and we are more than ready to jump in with both feet," said WPXI general manager Ray Carter. "It's really a great thing for us because it will give some of our great shows a chance to be sampled, whereas in the past, people might have been watching the lottery on KDKA or WTAE and stayed on the channel," said Mark Barash, WPXI director of programming.

WPXI-TV outbid other stations vying for the right to air the lottery results. The station wouldn't disclose its winning bid or the length of the contract. Although any influence on ratings can't be measured immediately, WPXI's winning the lottery broadcast can't hurt, Mr. Barash said: "You can always measure apples to apples from year to year." – **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**



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