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Atlantic Broadband has extended its existing fiber network over 16 miles in Talbot County, Md., to deliver faster and more reliable 911 service to the community. The initiative was undertaken by Atlantic Broadband, the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, Easton Utilities, and the Talbot County Department of Emergency Services.

The project created a new point-to-point connection between the Talbot County Department of Emergency Services and the area’s enhanced 911 tower. It was completed in less than a month following the request of Talbot County, the company reports.

“Atlantic Broadband is happy to extend its fiber network and connect the Talbot County 911 tower to the emergency services center through this point-to-point dark fiber deployment,” Scott Randall, Atlantic Broadband’s Maryland/Delaware vice president and general manager, notes in a statement. “Due to the tower’s remote location, cross-organizational collaboration was critical, and it could not have been completed without the Maryland Broadband Cooperative and Easton Utilities. We were able to quickly and efficiently solve a problem, and as a result, the county’s emergency services are more accessible to the community.”

Since the area received more than 55,000 first responder calls each year and was experiencing inconsistent radio reception, the county required a reliable redundant network, adds Brian LeCates, acting director of Talbot County Department of Emergency Services. Talbot County is part of Maryland FIRST (Maryland First Responders Interoperable Radio System Team), which provides a digital and secure radio system to connect first responders across agencies. “The installation’s enhanced services are significant for the county and overall community, and it will have lasting benefits,” LeCates says. – *CED Magazine*

Fiber optic broadband service company GoNetSpeed announced Tuesday that it will bring high-speed internet to two communities in Beaver County, adding another option to the area’s digital infrastructure. The company will provide a fiber optic network to residential customers and businesses in Ambridge by October and will target Beaver Falls shortly afterward.

The digital divide between internet accessible communities and disconnected pockets runs deep. Despite rising Internet adoption among all demographics, at least one in five Americans did not have access to the internet. At least one million Pennsylvanians did not have Internet access in 2015 according to U.S. Census data from that year.

GoNetSpeed’s residential service plans begin at \$50 per month for 100 megabit of bandwidth. Other options, including packages for 500 megabits or one gigabit of bandwidth, are also available. Management consulting firm Deloitte found less than one third of U.S. homes have access to

**Zap2it
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for Week
Ending July
23**

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State
treasurer:
Budget
negotiators
need to
reach a
consensus
— and soon**

**Pittsburgh
Post-Gazette
Editorial:
Heat on
Harrisburg –
Keep
pressure on
to solve
revenue side
of budget**

**pennlive.com
Editorial: No
budget? No
pay -
seriously**

a fiber optic network and 25 percent of homes have access to more than one provider who offers at least a 25 megabits per second speed tier or higher.

Bob Grove, vice president of public relations for Comcast Keystone Region said the Internet behemoth



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TV
EVERYWHERE
CONTENT
TO YOUR
TARGET
AUDIENCE
ON THE
RIGHT DEVICE
AT THE
RIGHT TIME**

has has been serving Beaver Falls and Ambridge for a number of years through its hybrid fiber network. “We have the ability to give you 2 gigs per second if you want it,” he said. “And there are gigabit speeds over our current network that will become available in Beaver Falls in the coming months.”

GoNetspeed will also offer Internet and Ethernet services to the business community in Pittsburgh, at large. “The initial response to our service offering in Ambridge and Beaver Falls has been tremendous,”

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GoNetspeed Chairman Frank Chiaino, said in a release. “We’re now actively engaging in build plans, adding to our staff and looking forward to working with local contractors and community leaders.” The company is interested in expanding to other communities in Pennsylvania where there is demand. – *Beaver County Times*

Wednesday marks the 25th day without a fully functioning state budget in Pennsylvania.

The state Senate plans on returning Wednesday and Thursday to possibly vote on a package of revenue and tax ideas to help pay for a \$32 billion spending bill that the Legislature approved on June 30 and that Gov. Tom Wolf let lapse into law without his signature 10 days later. That Senate package could include a tax code bill that would add a sales tax to basic cable.

The code bill also could re-instate a gross receipts tax, akin to a sales tax, on natural gas use just as the levy already exists for electricity and telephones. The natural gas gross receipts tax ended in the

late 1990s. Another bill could call for taking a \$1.5 billion loan from the state's tobacco legal settlement account to help fill the state's \$2.2 billion structural deficit by the end of the 2017-18 fiscal year.

But no matter what the Republican-controlled Senate does over the next two days, the GOP-controlled House may not come back to Harrisburg until after Labor Day. House Speaker Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny, called no new session days before departing for a GOP political event in Atlanta while also blaming the Senate and Wolf for the impasse and voicing opposition to all tax increase ideas.

Meanwhile, everything remains open. Taxpayers have access to parks, state police barracks, driver's license offices, liquor stores, welfare offices and the like because the state's more than 105,300 hourly and wage employees are drawing paychecks along with its 253 full-time elected lawmakers. On the local level, public schools and counties remain flush because local property taxes and other levies are rolling in to their coffers. And, it doesn't look like any entity will experience a funding freeze as schools and social services agencies faced during the nine-month-long budget fight in 2015-16. "Treasury will continue to pay all lawful and correct expenditures pursuant to the current fiscal year enacted budget," said Heidi Havens, spokeswoman for state Treasurer Joe Torsella. If budgeted funds run out, she said, the department will work with Wolf to cover "preferred operating needs."

Meanwhile, Democrat Wolf remains upbeat. He seemingly is content to let Republicans beat up each other amid the knowledge he has carte blanche over the spending they authorized, and watching as Turzai, a potential 2018 gubernatorial contender, shoulders more budget blame than anyone else as evidenced by protests outside his Pittsburgh-area district office and a scathing Scranton Times-Tribune editorial on Tuesday that said, "this deficit is the product of Turzai's watch, not Wolf's."

Wolf is in a better position than Turzai or the Senate Republican leadership because Republicans can't seem to agree on funding ideas despite having such large majorities, said Thomas Baldino, a Wilkes University political science professor. "I've been impressed with how Wolf's been able to stand on the sidelines, offer comment without drawing too much attention to himself while allowing the dysfunction within the the Republican ranks to manifest itself in ways that are fairly obvious for everyone to see," Baldino said.

So far, the budget fight doesn't appear to have hurt Wolf politically even with Turzai and Sen. Scott Wagner, R-York, eyeing his job, said Chris Borick, Muhlenberg College political science professor and pollster. That could be because the spending plan doesn't include big cuts that impact people, he said. But Wolf could be hurt by any tax proposals that could materialize. Conversely, he said, Turzai could be hurt in a general gubernatorial election by his vocal opposition to a severance tax on natural gas drillers. On Tuesday, Steve Miskin, spokesman for House GOP Caucus, blamed Wolf for the deficit, saying the governor should have froze spending in 2016-17 when revenues were coming in short.

Wolf's February budget proposal included \$2 billion in cuts and savings, countered spokesman J.J. Abbott. Most of those savings were included in the spending plan the House and Senate already adopted, he said. "Gov. Wolf is focused on resuming bipartisan negotiations and working with willing parties in the General Assembly to responsibly balance the budget," Abbott said.

The legislative disorder was on display Saturday when Turzai, who took over House budget talks from Majority Leader Dave Read, R-Indiana, was unable to win caucus support for his budget proposal. That proposal, which was kept away from Democrats, was devoid of tax increase proposals and called for the tobacco settlement loan, putting slot machines in bars, taverns and other places with liquor licenses and selling the state-owned liquor stores, according to PennLive/Patriot-News. Turzai told reporters that Wolf and the Senate needed to step up their leadership, especially because they have rejected the House's gambling and liquor bills and sought more spending than the House wanted in 2017-18.

Turzai's remarks led Senate Republicans to say it was time for all parties to re-enter budget negotiations. "We'll keep an open door to the House, to the Senate Democrats, to the governor, in order to work on a package that can be signed by the governor and can end the '17-18 budget," Drew Crompton, Senate Republicans' top lawyer, told PennLive/Patriot-News.

On Monday, Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman, R-Centre, speaking before the Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association in Harrisburg, said all sides knew this year's budget was going to be difficult and there were no easy ways to solve it. Now, Corman said, Wolf has complete control over the budget to decide whether to spend it all or freeze some of it should the Legislature not pass a funding package. If the Legislature cannot pass a funding package, he said, it could lead to more credit downgrades that would impact the cost to borrow and keep businesses from moving to the state. "That would be a complete, in my opinion, irresponsibility by the Legislature not to come to some agreement," Corman said. "It would put Pennsylvania in a really bad position moving forward." – **Allentown Morning Call**; [more from Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

An influential House committee chairman is launching a new effort to pass compromise net-neutrality legislation, seeking common ground between high-tech and telecommunications firms that have battled for a decade over internet governance rules. Commerce Chairman Greg Walden (R., Ore.) said he would begin hearings in early September with executives from major internet firms such as Facebook Inc., Alphabet Inc., Amazon.com Inc. and Netflix Inc., as well as major broadband providers such as AT&T Inc. and Comcast Corp.

The Federal Communications Commission is [moving toward a vote as soon as September](#) to void much of the current rules of the road for the internet, although officials on Tuesday didn't offer a firm timeline for a decision. Internet and telecommunications firms have bickered for the past decade over details of the rules—for example, whether providers should be prohibited from blocking content or offering fast lanes to those willing to pay. The FCC also has struggled to find the proper legal footing for its internet rules among the aging federal telecommunications laws, and two previous versions of its rules were tossed out by courts.

Many policy makers and tech-law experts say Congress has neglected to keep telecommunications laws up to date given the pace of change in technology and the growth of the companies that drive the internet. The last major rewrite was more than 20 years ago. "It is time for Congress to legislate the rules of the internet, and stop the ping-pong game of regulations and litigation," Mr. Walden said. He made his comments Tuesday at a subcommittee hearing on FCC oversight.

Tech firms gained strong protection from their telecommunications rivals in the latest version of the net-neutrality rules adopted by the FCC in 2015, during the Obama administration. Those strict rules prohibited the providers from blocking, throttling or offering fast lanes, and reclassified the internet providers as common carriers, subjecting them to strict utility-style oversight. But the GOP victory in 2016 has led to an effort to roll back those net-neutrality rules. Republicans generally have been sympathetic to arguments by telecommunications firms that the strict 2015 version will slow investment in broadband, partly because of the risk that the rules will be further tightened to include rate regulation. Republicans are likely to seek to maintain net-neutrality principles in whatever they adopt, but the new rules are likely to be less prescriptive.

The rollback effort has generated considerable controversy, and more than 12 million comments—many of them opposing the rollback—have been filed with the FCC, although officials question the validity of some, saying they were generated by bots. Whatever the FCC adopts is almost sure to be the subject of another lengthy legal challenge. That has further encouraged Republicans to try to pass legislation, which they last tried in 2015. Faced with the growing likelihood of a sweeping rollback of the 2015 rules, some tech firms also have appeared to voice stronger support for legislation lately.

During an [internet protest of the planned rollback](#) on July 12, for example, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a posting that his company strongly supports the current rules, but is "open to working with members of Congress" on new legislation to protect net neutrality. Telecommunications firms were encouraged by the news, while internet companies were more reserved.

AT&T Executive Vice President Tim McKone said in a blog post that Mr. Walden's announcement "demonstrates that momentum appears to be building for a legislative solution to put sensible open internet rules on solid ground....While being trapped in an endless loop of controversy over net neutrality may be in the interest of those who fundraise off of it, it is poor public policy that threatens investment by service providers and denies consumers the tremendous benefits that stem from such investment."

Comcast said in a statement, "We applaud Chairman Walden's call to hear from companies across the internet ecosystem...on the ground rules for net neutrality going forward. Comcast believes the best way to stop the regulatory ping-pong on this important issue is for Congress to enact bipartisan legislation."

A spokeswoman for Facebook confirmed that the company received an invitation to the event and is currently reviewing it. Representatives of for Alphabet, Amazon and Netflix declined to comment. — *Wall Street Journal*

For years, tech companies and Internet providers have been at each others' throats on Internet policy — and [net neutrality](#) especially. Now, House Republicans are teeing up a big showdown on the issue, inviting the biggest companies from both industries to testify on Capitol Hill this fall.

Top executives from AT&T, Comcast, Facebook, Google, Netflix and Verizon, among others, are all being asked to show up on Sept. 7 to argue their side. "Your company has played a significant part in the public conversation to date, and your input would be invaluable" as Congress begins to talk about

legislation that could replace the government's net neutrality rules, according to a letter sent by committee chair Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.) to Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg and other execs.

It's unclear which chief executives may attend; Facebook said Tuesday that it had received the letter and was reviewing it. Net neutrality is the concept that Internet providers should not slow down, block or charge websites a fee for their content to be displayed on consumers' screens. In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission implemented rules that would enshrine that principle into regulation. But Internet providers objected and sued to overturn the rules, saying the FCC's move was too burdensome and would prevent them from finding new ways of making money. Consumer groups argue that only strong rules such as the FCC's can prevent the industry from tilting the Internet economy to benefit their own, proprietary or partner websites.

The current FCC, under chairman Ajit Pai, has [proposed rolling back the rules](#). With a 2-1 majority at the commission, Pai has enough votes to succeed. Analysts widely expect the move to be challenged in court. In remarks at a subcommittee hearing Tuesday, Walden said bringing the two industries together would provide an opportunity to "stop the ping-pong games of regulation and litigation."

The FCC is currently [taking comments](#) from the public on its proposal. More than 12 million have been filed to date, though the comment system has been a [subject of controversy](#) amid polarizing accusations of automated and bogus comments clogging the docket, as well as a dispute over [an alleged denial-of-service](#) attack against the agency.

Republicans in both houses of Congress are stepping up calls for a net neutrality bill. But the effort appears to lack Democratic backing as the party has sought to turn net neutrality into a campaign issue targeting Republicans. Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-N.J.), the top Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said the FCC plan for net neutrality represents a high-profile example of the agency "siding with large corporations over small businesses and hardworking Americans." – *Washington Post*

