



August 29, 2019

The Hill
FCC dismisses
Warren's
attacks as 'hot air'

New York
Times

An effort to expand the reach of broadband in Pennsylvania is expected to get rolling again when lawmakers return to Harrisburg next month. That work will follow a summer some lawmakers have spent holding hearings around the commonwealth. According to the Federal Communications Commission, over 600,000 state residents don't have access to high-speed internet. Other groups, like the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, [argue that number is much higher.](#)

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[Philadelphia Inquirer](#)
[The race for 5G and what you need to know](#)

[Fierce Wireless](#)
[Sprint delivers 5G coverage in NYC, despite delayed rollout](#)

[Ars Technica](#)
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[Delaware County Daily Times](#)
[Editorial: Time to hang up on nuisance robocalls](#)

Kristin Phillips-Hill, a GOP York County senator, has been partnering with Greene County Democratic Representative Pam Snyder to figure out a way to increase access. She acknowledged, it's a huge undertaking. "I'm told, on average it takes about six years to get a bill from concept to law," she said. At this point, she said lawmakers are not in the phase where they're projecting costs or figuring out logistics. They're listening to people. "You can't just throw money at a problem that's not quantified," Hill argued. "That's what leads to a waste of taxpayer resources and private sector resources."

So far, the lawmakers have had a hearing in Indiana County. Two more are planned for Monroe and Fayette Counties, and then they'll head back to the Capitol to debrief. – *WITF-TV/FM, Harrisburg*

There is no denying that rural America needs better access to broadband in order to thrive in the 21st century. But plans unveiled by Senator Elizabeth Warren and Mayor Pete Buttigieg risk wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on ill-suited technology.

Providing strong internet connection to rural areas has been no easy task. The availability of fixed terrestrial broadband with download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) reaches about [74% of rural Americans and 68% in Indian Tribal areas](#). Wireless downstream speeds of at least 5 Mbps are available to 99% and 97%, respectively. Still, a reliable and affordable internet connection is the backbone of countless service industries, and its absence puts an economic strangle-hold on rural communities.

Unsurprisingly, the topic has become a campaign issue for 2020 Democratic party candidates. South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg has [pledged \\$80 billion](#) to create a public broadband provider for areas where there are few or no private companies offering service. Similarly, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Ma) wants to create an [Office of Broadband Access](#) to distribute \$85 billion in federal grants for high-speed public broadband in underserved areas. City governments would also gain control of utility poles and conduits under the plan.

The problem with these proposals is that they both rely on constructing endless miles of fiber cables across farmland and forests—with bureaucrats at the helm. History is clear that grants for broadband deployment have a checkered scorecard for success. As the University of Florida's [Professor Mark Jamison highlights](#), broadband grant programs run by the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce under the Obama administration achieved only 10% of what it promised.

Moreover, creating a government-owned broadband provider in markets with only one private competitor, for instance, would mean the end of private investment in rural communities and the dependence on government services. The historical record of government-owned broadband points to example after example of [financial losses, high prices, and cross-subsidies](#). Granting bureaucrats control of utility poles and conduits would also open the door to prolific rent-seeking. By charging [private providers inflated fees](#), city governments are able to simultaneously line the public coffers while driving up costs for consumers.

Expanding the size and scope of government under the Warren and Buttigieg plans risks incentivizing the construction of expensive and inappropriate infrastructure. This, in turn, could derail the strides the industry has already made to bring broadband to rural areas. Mayor Buttigieg's plan is the perfect example of this. While the Mayor pledges to support the expansion of commercial satellites, countless billions of dollars will be wasted in pursuing the conventional expansion of rural fiber networks at the same time.

Between 2016 and 2017, the number of rural Americans without broadband dropped by 18%—an achievement that was replicated in previous years. Rather than pumping the brakes, this trend should be bolstered by greater investment and innovation in the private sector. Providers like HughesNet already offer broadband-speed satellite internet to every inch of the 50 states and Puerto Rico. Increased competition among satellite providers is increasingly pushing them to provide better service at a lower cost to consumers in rural areas. Following SpaceX's lead, Amazon is hoping to launch over 3,000 satellites to provide broadband almost anywhere on earth.

There is also the potential for other wireless competitors. Microsoft has proposed using TV white spaces to offer low-cost broadband services in rural markets. Furthermore, the FCC's recent approval of the T-Mobile/Sprint merger comes with promises to build out 5G services into rural markets, which puts pressure on other major wireless providers to follow suit. Rather than spending billions of dollars to run cables across the American interior, government should allow the private sector and its cutting-edge technology to provide better broadband for rural America. — *Townhall*

Amazon.com Inc. is steadily increasing its investment in IMDb TV, its ad-supported streaming service for on-demand movies and television shows, as consumers suggest that there is room for alternatives to ad-free subscription video. In recent months, Amazon has asked content suppliers for more exclusive licenses to movies and TV shows for IMDb TV, according to people familiar with the effort. It contacted Vice Media to discuss a deal for IMDb TV to pick up "Vice News Tonight," the Emmy-winning half-hour news program canceled by HBO earlier this year, according to a person with knowledge of the outreach.

The company has also begun offering to pay an upfront license fee for some type of exclusivity, moving past IMDb TV's initial focus on only sharing ad revenue for compensation, the people said. For some content owners, upfront fees are more attractive because they guarantee a fixed payment. Pure revenue-sharing deals and hybrid deals that mix a fee with revenue-sharing are available as well. And Amazon is exploring creating linear channels within IMDb TV, according to the people familiar with the matter. These TV-like "always-on" channels could be focused on genres such as crime and lifestyle, or dedicated to specific outside media outlets. Amazon is speaking with studios, TV programmers and other content producers about stocking channels with content or supplying entire channels of their own, the people said. IMDb TV's competitors the Roku Channel and Pluto TV already offer such linear feeds.

The push for more ad-supported streaming video comes as the subscription-based option gets crowded. Established ad-free services, such as Netflix, Hulu (which also has an ad-supported tier) and Amazon's Prime Video, are set to contend with Walt Disney Co.'s Disney+ and WarnerMedia's HBO Max, both of which are on the horizon. "The rapid

growth of free, ad-supported video streaming services has taken the industry by surprise, given that there is already so much out there,” said Alan Wolk, co-founder of media consulting firm TVRev. “I suspect people watch them as lean-back or background TV, often as something to have on as they’re doing something else.”

Amazon introduced IMDb TV in January as a free app, originally called IMDb Freedive. It sits within Amazon’s advertising organization, which is separate from its Prime Video division, according to people familiar with the company’s structure. Amazon hasn’t disclosed audience numbers for IMDb TV. Free rival services such as Pluto TV and Tubi have claimed 18 million and 20 million monthly viewers, respectively, but those numbers haven’t been independently verified. In June, Amazon said IMDb TV was one of the top ad-supported apps on its Fire TV streaming viewing platform.

In June, Amazon said it planned to triple IMDb’s selection of movies and TV shows, which included adding award-winning films such as “La La Land” and “Drive.” (“La La Land” has been licensed as an ad-supported streaming exclusive, according to a person familiar with the matter.) IMDb TV offers a handful of original short-form video series and will premiere its first scripted short-form show, “You’re Not a Monster,” in the fall. The company is open to original long-form programming as well, said the person familiar with the matter.

Amazon has been staffing up IMDb TV, naming longtime Amazon and Prime Video executive Mark Eamer as vice president of IMDb TV in March; hiring Eric Ratchman, a former TV executive with ESPN and Univision, as head of business for IMDb TV; and making other hires across distribution, product and other departments. — *Wall Street Journal*



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