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September 4, 2019

Washington Post
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Telemedicine can help save lives, and improving broadband internet access makes telemedicine work better, an anesthesiologist said in testimony submitted at a legislative hearing Tuesday.

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The comments submitted by Pennsylvania Medical Society President Dr. Danae Powers were for the second of four hearings to be held statewide on increasing access to high-speed broadband internet service. “Whether it is a concerned parent whose rural pediatrician needs the expertise of a subspecialist, the inner-city parent whose high-risk pregnancy is jeopardized because of the transportation obstacles, or the inability to accurately diagnose a rural patient’s possible stroke because there isn’t a neurologist within a two-hour drive; telemedicine can quite literally be the difference between life and death,” Powers said in written testimony.

Funding expanded rural internet access was a component of a proposed \$4 billion-plus capital improvement program proposed by Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, earlier this year. Although Wolf’s proposal is still awaiting action in Harrisburg — and Republicans have pitched alternative proposals — hearings like the one held Tuesday are focusing attention on the crimping effects of slow internet. The hearing at the Monroe County Public Safety Center was conducted by the Senate Communications & Technology Committee.

The Federal Communications Commission has said more than 800,000 Pennsylvania residents do not have access to broadband internet connections. Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill, a York County Republican and chair of the committee, said the figure included 25,000 people in her own county. Sen. Mario Scavello, a Monroe County Republican who helped host the session, said that expanding broadband in Monroe would let some county residents who drive more than two hours to jobs in New York City work from home.

Among those who testified Tuesday was state Public Utility Commission Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille, who said a big issue would be “the cost of the build-out” for deploying broadband equipment in rural areas. She did not give a number. In his Restore Pennsylvania proposal issued earlier this year, Wolf said grants would be made available to bring high-speed internet to all parts of the state. – [Allentown Morning Call; more in Stroudsburg Pocono Record](#) (BCAP Vice-Chairman Joe Lorah, Blue Ridge Communications, testified on behalf of the industry at Tuesday’s hearing, along with Brian Barro, BCAP Vice-President, Government Affairs. BCAP Chairman Fran Bradley, Atlantic Broadband, will testify at the Committee’s second hearing scheduled for tomorrow (Thursday) morning at Penn State’s Fayette Campus in Lemont Furnace.)

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) cleared a hurdle some commissioners said would make it easier for rural Pennsylvanians to get access to broadband, but that another said doesn’t explore potential costs. The PUC voted, 4-1, to take over jurisdiction from the Federal Communications Commission of pole attachments, which would create a statewide forum to establish rates, terms for using utility poles and obtaining rights-of-way.

The measure also establishes a group that will advise the commission on any issues with state and federal pole attachment. The PUC Pole Attachment Working Group will consist of members of the PUC’s technical and legal staff, pole owners, pole attachers, telecommunication/broadband interest groups, consumer and small business advocates and others. The group will also be charged with handling complaints and resolving disputes.

Giving the PUC a dispute forum will expedite broadband to the commonwealth's rural areas and it's not just about having the ability to watch Netflix, said Commissioner Norman Kennard. "It is education," Kennard said. "It is health care. It is business. It's an essential service. It's as essential in some ways as electricity and other services for economic good, particularly in rural areas that are remote and need that access. Providing a dispute forum for pole attachments at the commission will allow for prompt resolution of fiber and wireless deployment and result in more efficient and better priced broadband expansion for the benefit of our rural residents."

Vice Chairman David Sweet dissented, saying he supported broadband expansion but questions about costs remain. "I'm compelled to dissent from today's action because it entirely avoids this fundamental issue," Sweet said. "The fiscal impact of this initiative must be explored or should have been explored before we assume this substantial federal rule obligation and not afterward."

Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille said the costs of the dispute process would be discussed more at a later date but she supported the FCC fee of \$259 until the PUC knows how many will go through the process and the costs. Commissioner Andrew Place voted for the initiative, but said he had concerns about a pending federal appeal concerning pole attachments in a written statement he read to the commission.

"The adoption of the present final rulemaking order and final form regulations cannot possibly account for all future contingencies involving the commission's enforcement of the FCC's pole attachment rules and related dispute resolution or adjudication," Place said. "For various reasons, I would have preferred a constructive dialogue engagement between our staff and interested stakeholders after the receipt of the formal initial reply and comments to the commissioners proposed rules prior to the submission of the recommendation that's before us today." – *The Center Square*

AT&T promoted longtime executive John Stankey to a newly created No. 2 role, setting up the WarnerMedia boss as the likely successor to Chief Executive Randall Stephenson. Mr. Stankey, 56 years old, will serve as president and chief operating officer starting next month. He will continue to serve as the head of WarnerMedia, the unit that houses HBO, the Warner Bros. studio and cable channels like CNN.

He will report to Mr. Stephenson and is the front-runner to take over the top job, according to people familiar with the matter. Mr. Stankey joined one of AT&T's predecessors in 1985 and spent most of his career in the telecommunications business. Mr. Stephenson, 59 years old, hasn't indicated when he plans to retire, though he has been CEO for 12 years and there are discussions for and against his retirement at the board level, the people said. Mr. Stephenson has reshaped AT&T during his tenure, piling on tens of billions of dollars in debt to turn the Dallas company into one of the world's biggest media producers.

The promotion comes after Mr. Stankey's main rival for the No. 2 job, AT&T Communications chief John Donovan, said last week that he would retire on Oct. 1. The 58-year-old executive decided to step down when it became clear he wasn't in line to become chief operating officer under the new regime, some of the people said. The company on Tuesday promoted Jeff McElfresh, 48, the telecom division's head of technology and operations, to succeed Mr. Donovan. He will oversee the company's core wireless and

telephone businesses, as well as DirecTV, its satellite-TV service. Mr. McElfresh will report to Mr. Stankey, as will the WarnerMedia unit and Brian Lesser, CEO of Xandr, the company's digital advertising business.

Mr. Stankey became a media executive after AT&T acquired Time Warner, the result of a protracted antitrust battle started by Justice Department authorities who said the merger would hurt competition. He has replaced most of the Time Warner leadership team and brought in new deputies including former NBCUniversal executive Robert Greenblatt.

Mr. Stankey will take on more responsibilities during a pivotal time for WarnerMedia, which plans to launch an early version of **a new streaming brand** called HBO Max in October. The online video service will carry films and TV shows and will eventually have live events like sports. AT&T moved beyond its telephone roots in 2015 when it bought DirecTV, turning the company into the nation's biggest pay-TV provider. The company doubled down on the media business in 2018 when it spent more than \$80 billion to acquire Time Warner. That business, renamed WarnerMedia, has featured the kind of boom-and-bust performance familiar to most media companies. DirecTV has lost millions of customers as high prices and streaming options like Netflix Inc. convince subscribers to cut the pay-TV cord.

As it explored CEO succession, AT&T discussed combining the DirecTV and WarnerMedia businesses, said one person familiar with the matter. It isn't known whether that will happen now that Mr. Stankey has been promoted, another person said. The wireless and telecom businesses still account for most of the company's revenue. In a securities filing Tuesday, AT&T said it hasn't yet determined what Mr. Stankey's compensation will be in the new COO role. In 2018, he received \$16.6 million in compensation, including stock awards, a base salary of \$2 million and a \$2 million bonus for the closing of the Time Warner merger. – **Wall Street Journal**

