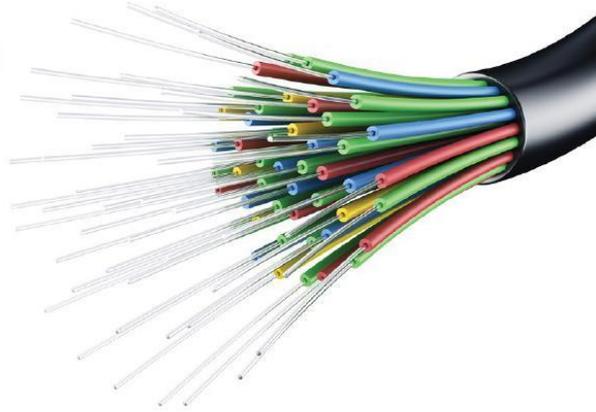


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The prior edition had the incorrect date. Our apologies.

The need for high-speed internet in rural areas is akin to the electrification push of last century. There are challenges for which free markets aren't sufficient, for which the public interest demands a public intervention to spread the benefits and power of progress to all, or at least most.

Think of the push in the middle of the last century to bring electricity to farms and rural residents in places where extending the needed infrastructure didn't make conventional economic sense for private and government power companies. The return on investment just didn't work. In 1932, only about 10% of rural America was electrified, according to the National Museum of American History. That created a growing economic apartheid that undercut living standards and innovation in rural areas relative to more populous locales with economies of scale. So the federal government seeded an effort to bring rural communities and residents together in electric cooperatives to begin closing that gap. Now it's hard to imagine broad swaths of America without power.

The Erie region, state and nation find themselves in a similar situation in regard to the digital technology frontier. As with other chronic disparities in American life, this one has been rendered more glaring by the coronavirus pandemic. When schools closed last spring as COVID-19 cases spiked, educators scrambled to pivot to online instruction. That was complicated even

[Bloomberg Amazon Hiring 100,000 New Employees in U.S. and Canada](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer A Pennsylvania town once known as 'communism on the prairie' is all about Trump now](#)

[SpotlightPA Top Pa. GOP lawmaker taps politically connected lobbyist to be chief of staff](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer Op-ed: As 2020 election nears, attacks on press freedom are un-American and inexcusable](#)

in areas with robust broadband service by gaps in economic status and access to the technology.

But in some rural areas in the region, the infrastructure itself was insufficient or simply not available. Limited population density in those areas meant private investment in high-speed internet infrastructure didn't add up. That has become an ever bigger issue as so much communication, commerce and now education have migrated online. In some areas, even workarounds like cellular hot spots don't help because households can't get cellular service. As David Bruce [reported last week](#), the gap persists in the new school year as the pandemic's persistence has prompted many school systems to continue online learning, at least part of the time. That has emphasized the need for public interventions akin to rural electrification last century.

Progress has been made. Earlier this year, the Federal Communications Commission awarded **Armstrong Telecommunications** a \$2.64 million grant to extend high-speed internet service to nearly 2,000 households and businesses in Erie County. A similar grant in 2018-19 extended service to 2,100 households in the region.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the gaps that remain. Even before COVID-19, those gaps were putting rural communities and residents at a disadvantage. Now they are hindering the education of some of our children, threatening to leave them behind. More public investment in rural broadband infrastructure is needed at the national and state levels. High-speed internet has become an essential utility, like electricity, for all residents and communities. – **Erie Times-News editorial**

ViacomCBS Inc. is close to selling CNET Media Group to Red Ventures LLC, according to people familiar with the matter, as the entertainment giant sheds parts of its business to focus on video streaming.

Red Ventures, a media and technology company, is expected to pay about \$500 million to acquire the network of websites, which includes CNET, GameSpot and ZDNet, the people said. The deal could be announced as soon as Monday, assuming the talks don't fall apart, the people said. [Red Ventures' initial interest in CNET](#) was first reported by The Wall Street Journal last month.

Fort Mill, S.C.-based Red Ventures has struck a series of deals in recent years that has made it an important competitor in the digital-media sector. [It purchased Bankrate](#), a personal-finance website, in 2017 for \$1.24 billion, and acquired health and wellness websites owned by Healthline Media for an undisclosed sum last year. [It also owns the Points Guy](#), a travel-rewards site, and Reviews.com, which publishes information about consumer products. Red Ventures plans to invest in CNET, GameSpot and ZDNet, as well as to expand the company's e-commerce business, the people said. A focus will be improving the design and performance of the sites, they said. CNET gets a cut of revenue from purchases made by readers who click on links to third-party merchants in its stories.

Red Ventures generates revenue by connecting readers to products offered by its marketing partners, such as credit cards, loans and travel packages. Red Ventures also operates digital advertising networks and a technology-licensing business. Acquiring CNET would allow Red Ventures to reach readers and advertisers in categories such as autos, small business and enterprise-technology products, the people said.

Red Ventures, which is backed by private-equity companies Silver Lake and General Atlantic, is profitable and valued at more than \$10 billion, some of the people said. CNET Media Group is profitable on a stand-alone basis, according to a person familiar with the matter, and generates more than \$100 million of revenue annually. Mark Larkin, executive vice president and general

manager of CNET Media Group, is expected to stay on through the acquisition, the people said. Red Ventures isn't planning to relocate CNET's employees, many of whom are based in the San Francisco Bay Area. More than 980 employees work for CNET's properties world-wide, according to another person familiar with the matter.

Founded in 1992, CNET acquired rivals such as GameSpot and ZDNet to become one of the most-visited technology-website networks globally. When it [was acquired by CBS Corp. in 2008](#) for \$1.8 billion, CNET's portfolio of websites drew 54 million unique users in the U.S. a month, which made it one of the most popular digital networks in the U.S. Since the deal, internet users have increasingly turned to major internet portals such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google and YouTube and social networks such as Facebook Inc. and Twitter. CNET also faces competition from newer technology sites, including Vox Media Inc.'s the Verge, G/O Media Inc.'s Gizmodo and Verizon Media Group's TechCrunch, and beefed-up technology coverage from general-interest news organizations.

CNET has changed since it was purchased by CBS more than a decade ago. In 2015, CBS Corp. said it sold some of its internet businesses in China, which included parts of CNET, for about \$385 million. CBS Interactive, the ViacomCBS unit that operates CNET, has shifted its focus toward direct-to-consumer video streaming in recent years. It created the CBS All Access streaming service that is expected to be at the heart of the company's coming direct-to-consumer offering.

ViacomCBS is focusing much of its efforts on [its direct-to-consumer streaming service](#), which is being rebranded and expanded. Earlier this year, ViacomCBS said that the so-called super service would include movies from the Paramount movie studio and shows from several of the company's television networks. ViacomCBS is looking to sell other assets, including the Simon & Schuster publishing house and CBS's Midtown Manhattan headquarters, known as Black Rock. ViacomCBS expects Simon & Schuster [to fetch at least \\$1.2 billion](#), and analysts expect the headquarters building [to sell for at least \\$800 million](#). – *Wall Street Journal*

Pennsylvania voters will soon issue their verdict on the legislature's response to the covid-19 pandemic by either extending the gains Democrats made two years ago or further tightening Republicans' longstanding grip on both chambers. The GOP-majority General Assembly has been in hybrid mode this year, after senators and representatives gave themselves the choice of attending floor sessions in person or casting votes remotely.

In a string of bipartisan votes early in the crisis this spring, they gave schools flexibility on the 180-day instruction requirement, provided front-line workers with protective equipment and delayed the April primary election to June. But Republicans soured on elements of Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf's pandemic response, unsuccessfully attempting to overturn his business closure orders and prompting seven vetoes of covid-19 legislation. More recently, the parties have struggled to find common ground on a bill to fine-tune mail-in voting, including changes sought by the counties that must implement it.

State lawmakers rushed through a partial budget that avoided some difficult decisions in hopes the cloudy financial picture will become more clear. And while they passed laws to improve police training and hiring practices in response to protests about police mistreatment of Black people, there has not been action to ban chokeholds or adapt other changes that advocates have sought. A new law enacted late last year ended straight-ticket voting, a change Republicans wanted, and permitted mail-in voting even if the voter lacks a reason he or she cannot vote in person, a reform Democrats sought. So far this year, Democrats have requested mail-in ballots in much larger numbers.

Elimination of straight-ticket voting, a practice that let people cast ballots for all candidates from a given party by making a single choice in the voting booth, should give Republican candidates a significant boost, at least in some close races, predicted Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati. "We will see just what wins and loses on Nov. 3, straight party tickets or absentee ballots," said Scarnati, R-Jefferson.

The most significant legislation of the session before the pandemic hit was a law to give police more time to pursue criminal cases and victims more time to sue over sexual abuse of children. Lawmakers also took a first step toward amending the state constitution to provide a short and temporary time "window" for people to file lawsuits over abuse claims that would otherwise be too old to pursue. Among the 203 House districts, there are 129 races that pit a Democrat and Republican against each other. In the Senate, where 25 of 50 seats are up this cycle, 19 are contested by the major parties.

The House currently has a 110-93 Republican majority, a gap narrowed by an 11-seat pickup by Democrats in the 2018 election. The Senate majority consists of 28 Republicans and Sen. John Yudichak of Luzerne County, a Democrat who turned independent in November and who caucuses with the GOP. Democrats flipped five Senate seats two years ago and added a sixth in a special election last year, leaving them currently at 21 members. Muhlenburg College political science professor Chris Borick said that Democrats who want to retake the state House are "on the outer edges of what can be hoped for," and that he sees their chances for the Senate as even more of a reach. While there are GOP-held districts that have voted for Wolf and Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, Borick said, Democrats also have vulnerable incumbents. "Asking for kind of running the table in those and holding everything else is, I think, optimistic on their part, short of an absolute wave election," Borick said.

Dena Gleason, who manages campaigns for the House Democrats, said her candidates are working to distinguish the national political debate from what they hope to do in office next year. "Voters care deeply about local issues like education funding, overall health care costs, those regular, bread-and-butter issues," Gleason said. "Frankly, Harrisburg Republicans have not done a lot on those issues in a longtime." Lyndsay Kensinger, a spokesperson for Wolf, called legislative Republicans an impediment to agenda items such as raising the minimum wage, cutting student debt, and "government reforms so Pennsylvanians know that their state elected officials are working on behalf of them and not special interests."

The highest-profile state lawmakers to retire this year are Scarnati, who is the Senate's presiding officer, and the House speaker, Mike Turzai, whose suburban Pittsburgh seat has been vacant since he stepped down in June and was hired by an energy company. The former House Republican leader, Bryan Cutler of Lancaster County, was elevated to speaker, and the Senate's Republican leader, Sen. Jake Corman of Centre County, has the inside track to succeed Scarnati.

Democratic primary challengers this year took out several House incumbents: Reps. James Roebuck, Maria Donatucci and Roni Green, of Philadelphia, and Rep. Adam Ravenstahl, of Pittsburgh. Senate vacancies are in the southeast, where Sen. Andy Dinniman, D-Chester, is retiring, and both Sen. Daylin Leach, D-Montgomery, and Sen. Larry Farnese, D-Philadelphia, lost primaries. Senate strategists say Republicans' best hopes of a pickup are both in the Pittsburgh area, incumbent Democratic Sens. Pam Iovino and Jim Brewster.

Democrats have an opportunity in Erie against Sen. Dan Laughlin and in the Philadelphia suburbs against Sen. Tom Killion. Some also believe they can reclaim control of the chamber by also beating GOP Sens. John DiSanto in the Harrisburg area and Scott Martin in Lancaster. In the House, 11 of the 17 retirements are Republicans, including several seats in the Philadelphia suburbs and Lehigh Valley that Democrats have targeted. On the flip side are

Democratic retirements in GOP-friendly areas of Allegheny and Schuylkill counties.

With less than two months to go, homebound voters may soon find candidates at their doorstep. Rep. Greg Rothman, R-Cumberland, said that after a summer that was largely confined to phone contacts, candidates have begun canvassing in person. "Yes, even in the southeast," said Rothman, chair of his caucus' campaign effort. "We've been monitoring it to see what the reaction is. Most of the reaction's been positive." – **Associated Press**



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