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Op-ed: So

Washington loves to champion the little guy. From expanding the middle class to advocating on behalf of small business, nothing plays better politically than speechifying on behalf of policies to help everyday Americans. But now that Congress is reconvening, lawmakers have an opportunity — indeed, a responsibility — to go beyond lip service and make vital progress for millions of families and individuals.

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That course of action runs counter to the very policies that grew the Internet from a fledgling messenger network in the bowels of the Pentagon to the modern marketplace it's become. Today, 85 percent of Americans regularly use the Internet, according to the Pew Research Center. In 2011, a United Nations report identified access to the Internet as an "indispensable tool for realizing a range of human rights." From education to health care to cat memes, it's difficult to think of any aspect of daily life that wouldn't be detrimentally affected by raising the costs of getting online.

In areas like the Lehigh Valley or to the south in Philadelphia, taxing Internet access

The Internet Tax Moratorium, which since 1998 has prevented taxes on email and Internet access services, will expire on Oct. 1. Unless the U.S. Senate acts to immediately renew the law, Pennsylvanians from Allentown to Pittsburgh will get hit with a flood of new state and local taxes on their Internet services. The impact of allowing the built-in expiration to lapse is immense and predictable: Consumer costs will surge, competition among providers will dwindle, and broadband deployment will slow.

Taxes on the Internet would likely resemble those imposed on voice services, which run a whopping 17 percent on average. "Nationwide, revenue and regulators show every intention of applying tax burdens online that go far beyond those applied to other goods and services," the Wall Street Journal editorial board explained in June.

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need a
budget
again?

carries significant societal implications as well. Studies, including a 2013 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce, find Internet usage remains low among low-income and minority communities. According to a July report by PublicSource, "Philadelphia, along with Pittsburgh, Erie and Allentown, were among the least-connected cities in the nation with 100,000 or more residents. Between 70 to 77 percent of households in those cities had Internet access."

Increasing consumer costs by allowing state and local governments to impose hefty taxes will only push consumers offline — not bring more people online. Public- and private-sector cooperation has made big strides to close such gaps. Comcast's Internet Essentials initiative, for example, has helped connect 15,000 families in the Philadelphia area. Yet it is important to keep up the momentum. High school students without access to broadband Internet at home graduate at rates six to eight points lower than students who do, according to a study by the Federal Reserve. More than 80 percent of Fortune 500 businesses, companies like Walmart and Target, require online applications.

But the momentum could be lost if lawmakers fail to protect Americans against a costly spike in their monthly Internet access bills. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ranks the United States 30th out of 33 countries for Internet affordability, and even a modest tax on services could push more than 10 million users offline. Yet, that's a tall order for a town known more for its political brinkmanship than pragmatism.

Pennsylvania's own Sen. Pat Toomey has been at the vanguard of the fight to permanently cement in place protections prohibiting Internet access taxes, co-sponsoring the Senate's Internet Tax Freedom Forever Act. The House has already passed companion legislation, the Permanent Internet Tax Freedom Act, by an overwhelming margin. Toomey's leadership should set an example for his colleagues in the Senate to make a permanent extension a reality.

Congress, still struggling to win confidence with the American public, can make a genuine, positive impact by ensuring the ban on Internet access taxes does not expire. One of only a few bills with broad bipartisan support, this legislation will determine whether the Internet will continue to thrive as space of innovation and development — or if instead we'll turn back the clock. It seems like a no-brainer, but let's make sure Congress gets the message. — *Allentown Morning Call*

Madison Square Garden Co. provided more details about its split into two companies, setting a Sept. 30 date for the plan and naming Andrea Greenberg chief executive of its media business. The company, which is separating its media operations from its sports and entertainment segments, said Friday that the media entity will be called MSG Networks Inc.

Ms. Greenberg was executive vice president of the MSG Media division and is a former executive vice president of MSG Entertainment. She spent more than 25 years at Rainbow Media Holdings, which, like MSG, was once part of Cablevision Systems Corp.

In late 2014, MSG discussed potential spinoff structures, deciding in March to separate its sports and entertainment operations from its media business. MSG's sports activities include the New York Knicks and Rangers, while its entertainment operations include concerts and other events. The media business includes the MSG regional sports networks. Bret Richter was named chief financial officer of MSG Networks, joining from Cablevision, where he was executive vice president of corporate finance and development.

MSG said in October 2014 that "investors favor companies with greater strategic focus on their core businesses," and said activist investor Nelson Peltz would join its board. Mr. Peltz, who runs Trian Fund Management LP, is known for pushing to split up companies, a trend that has gained momentum: Companies including eBay Inc., Hewlett-Packard

Co., and DuPont Co. have announced separation plans. MSG previously said it expected long-term rights agreements would keep Knicks and Rangers games on MSG Network and MSG+.

In the June quarter, MSG's profit and revenue growth easily topped Wall Street expectations. Revenue grew 4.4% to \$387.9 million. MSG tapped sports-agency veteran David "Doc" O'Connor as CEO in June, a few months after CEO Tad Smith left to lead Sotheby's. The sports and entertainment company will have authorization to repurchase as much as \$525 million of common stock. – *Wall Street Journal*

The Wayne County Commissioners have approved an agreement with Blue Ridge Communications regarding a 911 Fiber Connection. "Wayne County 911 is proceeding with a project to have our 911 center in Pike County and Wayne County connected for radio purposes to help in regionalization and duplication of services," said Chief Clerk Vicky Botjer. "This is a right of way agreement with Blue Ridge Cable to proceed with fiber line installation."

She added the agreement allows Blue Ridge Communications to cross through county property to install the fiber lines. "With 911 they're trying to do some regionalization of services so, for example, if something happens here we can go to another county and do some sort of dispatch," Botjer explained. "We are working with 911 Pike County for radio connection so we'll be using the same radio system instead of buying a second system." The project is currently being worked on. – *Wayne Independent (Honesdale)*



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