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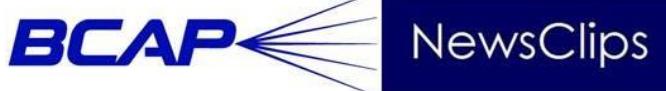
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September 21, 2020

**Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**  
'Today' show heads to McKeesport where students get laptops from Comcast

**WPMT-TV, York**  
"We're still in the Stone Ages": New plan could make it easier for people to log online

**New York Times**  
Jeff Zucker Helped Create Donald Trump. That Show May Be Ending.

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**  
As pandemic drags on, Pa. decision sets up national clash

August 2017 saw a major train derailment in Hyndman, Bedford County. This town is quintessential rural America — one main road, few stop lights and hardworking salt of the earth Americans. As several thousand tons of fuel and combustible material ignited the skies amid the crisp mountain air, emergency responders scrambled to effectuate an evacuation of the town's residents. But on this day, they faced a foe that could have been cataclysmic to this region. They could not effectively communicate with the residents or each other to warn of the impending explosion as no high-speed broadband existed, with little or no cellular phone service to compound the matter.

I thank God for the swift action of those brave men and women as they went door-to-door putting their own lives in jeopardy to save others. We dodged a bullet that day, but what about the next time? In today's age of technology and instant communication, why had this area been left behind? And more important, what could we do to remedy the problem?

That event served as the impetus to the research, development and ultimate drafting of Senate Bill 835, which will create a pilot program for the deployment of high-speed broadband to unserved areas of rural Pennsylvania. As the Trump administration has led the efforts to assist our residents in so many ways, and expanded access to telehealth services — thereby ensuring rural Americans have access to desperate health care — we need to ensure an effective delivery mechanism for these services. Senate Bill 835 will spur that development.

**over state shutdown orders**

**Associated Press**  
**The fight over Pennsylvania's voting law isn't over despite recent court decisions**

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
**'Disgusted' voters in the Philly suburbs could help Biden offset Trump's gains in Pennsylvania**

**Allentown Morning Call**

**Pat Toomey calls Ginsburg a 'trailblazer,' but is mum on whether Senate should move to replace her**

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
**Pennsylvania braces for a presidential election reshaped by a Supreme Court fight**

This pandemic has highlighted what we in rural areas have known for some time, that access to high-speed broadband is crucial to education, safety and economic development. As our schools were forced to close amid concerns of the pandemic in late March, our local school districts were given the unenviable task to deliver education remotely.

It was routine to hear those calls for our students to learn remotely, or go virtual, or log in to school from their homes. That was great for the student in cities such as Pittsburgh or Philadelphia or even in my hometown of Johnstown, but what were we to tell the kid in northern Bedford County or rural Clearfield or parts of rural Cambria, where high-speed broadband was simply not available?

In speaking with those affected by the lack of broadband as well as stakeholders, we needed to formulate an incentive to get this to our residents. Typically, vendors of broadband would invest in an area where they would get the most return on their investment, i.e., larger pockets of population, and few could fault them for this business decision. Some of our remote areas were just too sparse to attract the deployment of broadband to them.

Senate Bill 835 provides the funds for this build-out, provided that they use 25% of their own funds in the process. And, the language is clear; this must be for unserved areas, not to increase bandwidth to an area that is already served. As this bill passed the state Senate, I am confident it will pass the state House and be signed into law. Then, we can begin to implement it into action and ensure that rural Pennsylvania isn't left behind. – **Op-ed by Sen. Wayne Langerholc Jr. (R-Clearfield) in Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

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Three out of four members of the state's Public Utility Commission have finally agreed on something related to the ongoing moratorium on utility shutoffs.

For the first time in months, the four-member commission has broken the tie that hampered any movement on the topic. On Thursday, the regulators denied an effort by advocacy groups to launch a formal proceeding to decide how and when the moratorium should end. The PUC unanimously forbade utilities to shut off non-paying clients in March just as the country began to grasp the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic and Gov. Tom Wolf ordered residents to shelter in place. Since then, the commissioners have been unable to agree on a path forward.

Two members of the commission have wanted to end the moratorium since June, arguing that customers are accruing unpaid bills that they may be unable to pay in the future and that the indefinite halt in terminations may hurt utilities and, by extension, all their customers. The other two commissioners have been more cautious, hoping to wait until there are concrete plans in place to assist those in danger of being shut off and warning that Pennsylvania's economy is far from being back to normal.

The petition, filed last month by a coalition of groups representing senior citizens, tenants and low-income utility customers, asked for a public review process to gauge the impact of lifting the moratorium and to develop a plan to deal with accrued utility debts. Their proposal was similar to what Chairwoman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille proposed in July, when she asked to convene a stakeholder group headed by the PUC's staff to hash out these issues. When that was voted down, Ms. Dutrieuille wrote a letter last month inviting comments from these stakeholders in a less formal way.

The receipt of those comments — nearly everyone who weighed in other than the utilities urged the commission to keep the moratorium in place, while all the utilities asked to lift it — means the PUC has already given a voice to stakeholders, the commission's staff wrote in the motion to reject the petition, which was approved on Thursday. Chairwoman Dutrieuille agreed, although

she left open the possibility that a stakeholder process may be needed in the future.

Commissioner David Sweet was the one dissent on Thursday. "Like the petitioners, I believe that prior to ending the moratorium, there should be a plan in place," he wrote. The input that the commission has received following the chairwoman's letter last month hasn't resulted in a strategy, he noted. Referring to Ms. Dutrieuille's original proposal for a stakeholder process back in July, Mr. Sweet bemoaned: "It is unfortunate that we did not act to establish the collaborative then, and it remains unfortunate that we are not establishing it now." The moratorium on shutoffs remains in place.

— **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

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Running elections isn't cheap. Running a presidential election in a swing state during a global pandemic while an unprecedented flood of mail ballots threatens the possibility that the actual results won't be known for days? That's expensive.

First, Pennsylvania counties bought new equipment because a new law allows any voter to vote by mail. Then they bought more before the June 2 primary, as coronavirus fears of in-person voting fueled a massive surge in mail ballots, far beyond what was expected. Now, in the months since, counties have scrambled to buy much more equipment, spending millions of dollars to prepare for a huge volume of ballots and prevent a long, drawn-out vote-counting process.

Even just the number of high-speed scanners, which counties use to tally mail ballots, has increased significantly. Chester County had only one before the 2019 law was enacted. It bought another after, and now it has purchased a third, which cost about \$116,000. Philadelphia had four high-speed scanners and bought eight more after the primary. Montgomery County had five and has since bought 10 more. Bucks County bought six, bringing its total to 10. "We knew we would have to double our capacity here in terms of equipment and staff," said Lee Soltysiak, Montgomery County's chief operating officer and clerk of its elections board.

[It's been clear for a while](#) that counting mail ballots could lead to [long waits to call races](#), but the pandemic accelerated and compressed the transition to voting by mail, with the state jumping from 5% to 50% of votes cast by mail in less than a year. State officials expect about three million votes to be cast by mail this election (more than two million mail ballots have already been requested). But officials aren't legally allowed to start counting them until polls open on Nov. 3. [That means it could take days to call a winner in Pennsylvania, a state increasingly expected to play a decisive role](#) in determining who wins the presidency.

Officials are particularly worried about what happens while they count — and the world waits. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to vote by mail, especially after months of [false attacks](#) on the method by President Donald Trump. That means there will likely be [what's known as a "blue shift"](#) in the days after Election Day: The Republican-leaning in-person votes are counted first, making it seem Trump is winning handily, until the disproportionately Democratic mail ballots are slowly counted.

Complicating things further, the state Supreme Court on Thursday [extended the deadline](#) to allow ballots to be counted if they are received up to three days after Election Day. That increases the chances that thousands more mail ballots will need to be counted after polls close. It could be difficult to know even how many votes are still uncounted. And if the world goes days without knowing who won, misinformation and disinformation could fill the void, [damaging public trust in the election and undermining its legitimacy](#).

No pressure. “It doesn’t mean people shouldn’t have confidence in the results, it just means they have to have patience for the results,” Soltysiak said. “That’s the frustrating thing — not so much that it’s taking longer. … It’s the wringing of the hands and the skepticism that it can lead to.” Thus the mad scramble to buy equipment and increase staff. In the primary, most votes in the Philadelphia region weren’t counted by election night. A week later, half the state’s counties were still tallying votes. There will be twice as many votes to count in the general election. “We … didn’t have any of this machinery that we have now. It was literal human beings doing everything,” said Bob Harvie, the Bucks County commissioner who chairs the elections board.

Some of it is equipment that counties didn’t even realize they would need, such as letter openers that quickly slice open envelopes or more sophisticated [“extraction tables”](#) that both open envelopes and remove ballots from them. Philadelphia, for example, went from using the less-efficient letter openers in the primary to buying 22 extraction tables. Montgomery County didn’t have any ballot extractors in the primary, and bought 15 after.

There are plenty of other equipment costs, such as the [40-foot-long ballot sorters](#) that cost more than \$500,000 each — Philadelphia is buying two — and ballot drop boxes, printers, ballot folders, and more. Then there are various other costs, such as expanded office space to house equipment and workers, and upgraded security to protect it all. Counties are also shelling out for significantly higher staffing. They’ve got an aggressive but simple new plan for how to make use of all those people and all that equipment: Once they start counting ballots on Election Day, they won’t stop. “We’re planning on running 24 hours a day,” Harvie said. “Once we start opening ballots, we’re going to have different shifts where we’re never going to close the doors of the Board of Elections.”

That’s a significant departure from the past, when counties would process votes late into the night but eventually send everyone home, continuing to count ballots as part of lengthy workdays following an election. This year, those workdays won’t end. The counting won’t stop either in Philadelphia, nor in Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties. Together, the five Southeastern Pennsylvania counties have more than one-third of Pennsylvania’s registered voters. They will have to count hundreds of thousands of mail ballots — perhaps more than a million. “We’d like to be done … by the end of the week,” Harvie said of counting ballots in November. “I know that’s ambitious, but we’re going to do everything we can to make it happen.”

The primary was a wake-up call, elections officials said. They knew counting ballots would take time, but they’re determined to avoid such a prolonged process in November. [Some races took weeks to determine a winner](#). “One of the lessons learned we had was: If we threw more people at the problem, we could do this faster,” said Chester County administrator Bobby Kagel. The county on Thursday put out a call to government workers to help count ballots the week of the election, with about 200 people a day working across three eight-hour shifts.

The round-the-clock staffing will help prevent bottlenecks as ballots move through the counting process. In Philadelphia, for example, about three times as many ballots can be scanned every hour as can be removed from their envelopes and prepared for scanning. So while the actual counting of ballots may occur in batches a few times a day, the tedious work of opening envelope after envelope — about 12,000 an hour — will continue without stoppage.

And in another first, Philadelphia elections officials plan to begin counting ballots on Election Day. In the past, they didn’t open mail ballots until after, focusing their staff on running the in-person election. “We’re just changing with the times that have changed around us,” said Lisa Deeley, chair of the Philadelphia city commissioners, who run elections. “We’re going to do the best we can to get that count accurately and as quickly as possible, and I think

that we're going to be in a good place to get it all done." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*



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