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Is the government doing a good enough job getting Internet access to the people?

Until recently, the government's **own assessment** was no — things could be better for **many Americans fed up** with slow service, high prices or a lack of competition. But a looming change in the way officials define Internet service may soon prompt the Federal Communications Commission to change its mind and say that, in fact, it looks like consumers are doing just fine, thank you very much.

The heart of the matter has to do with the minimum benchmark for Internet service, the subject of much political debate in recent years. Until 2015, the definition of broadband had long been left at 4 Mbps. Those download speeds might have been good enough for most Web applications in the early 2000s. But the rise of data-hogging TV and music services, as well as the economy's broader shift to an Internet-first footing, meant that the 4 Mbps target didn't quite cut it anymore, the FCC said in 2015.

That year, the agency **revised its minimum definition** of broadband to be any service that offered at least 25 Mbps downloads and 3 Mbps uploads. By this definition, the FCC said, 55 million Americans lacked high-speed Internet. Almost overnight, the FCC essentially created a big mission for itself to solve, using all of the policy tools and money at its disposal. The move predictably divided people along partisan lines, with progressives supporting it as a push to enhance Internet access nationwide, while conservatives derided it as another example of government mission creep.

By working to publish a study on broadband deployment using the 25/3 definition, the FCC was deliberately concluding that industry had failed just so that it can "regulate it back to health," said Republican FCC commissioner Ajit Pai. Pai is now leading the FCC as its chairman. And the agency is poised to conduct the same study again, in accordance with its congressional mandate — but this time, Pai has asked whether it would be appropriate to use a looser standard to define broadband. Specifically, he's asked if it makes sense to use a 10 Mbps down / 1 Mbps up definition and whether to include mobile Internet in the definition.

If the FCC's upward revision to 25/3 suddenly created a whole class of Americans without broadband, revising it downward to 10/1 would mean millions of Americans suddenly "getting" broadband back, and eliminating a policy problem the FCC no longer needs to solve. For conservatives, this

doesn't stop Democrats' demands

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is precisely the point. In Pai's view, continually moving the goal posts is counterproductive, and misses what he says are the main barriers preventing Internet providers from upgrading their networks more quickly. "They indicate that their caution stems primarily from regulatory uncertainty and in particular their concerns about whether and how Internet Protocol-based (IP) networks are

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going to be regulated in the future," he said in 2015.

But

Democrats say reverting to a definition that makes it easier for the FCC to claim it's done its job simply sweeps the problems of affordable access under the rug. On Wednesday, Democratic FCC commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel said the idea of shifting to a 10/1 definition was "crazy." "Lowering standards doesn't solve our broadband problems," she tweeted.

Concluding that there's nothing to see here has myriad implications for the average consumer. If there is no problem, there is no need for action. While reasonable people can disagree over the merits and drawbacks of regulation, this decision could have even wider consequences — shaping how the FCC lays out its priorities, crafts its policies and even allocates its funding for infrastructure projects or benefit programs. Friday marks the public's last chance to weigh in. You can do so right here. — *Washington Post*

President Trump's unconventional approach to the rhetoric of his office — the early-morning tweets, the bombast at campaign rallies three years before his next election, the clashes with other politicians — is a double-edged sword, a new Pennsylvania poll shows. Trump's core base of voters in the state is sticking with him, according to G. Terry Madonna, director of the Franklin & Marshall College Poll.

But Republicans are putting some distance between themselves and the president — 53 percent of the party's voters rate his job performance positively, but that is down from 67 percent in May. Madonna said the biggest surprise in the new poll, being released Thursday, came when 398 registered voters surveyed from Sept. 13-18 were asked to grade Trump as if he were receiving a report card in school.

Madonna expected economic factors — unemployment and stock-market performance — to play in Trump's favor. They did not. "He doesn't seem to be getting the same kind of credit, because of the controversial nature of his presidency, that other presidents might get," Madonna said. "In other words, he seems to be stepping on his own message." That is one edge of the sword.

Voters gave Trump his highest marks in handling terrorism, with 49 percent dealing him an A or B. "He has been an outspoken critic of conventionality and the status quo and what to do about [terrorism], Madonna said. Trump's worst grades: 50 percent gave him an F on improving the country's health-care system, 47 percent gave him an F on dealing with climate change and the environment. Overall, 13 percent of the voters said Trump was doing an "excellent job," holding steady from polls in May and February, while 16 percent said he was doing a "good job," dropping from 24 percent in May and 19 percent in February.

He ranked “only a fair job” at 18 percent, up from 14 percent in May and 13 percent in February. Trump is doing a “poor job,” according to 53 percent, up from 49 percent in May but down from 54 percent in February. Madonna described as “flat” the job performance voters in the poll gave Gov. Wolf, who is seeking a second term next year. He attributed that to state services and programs not being cut — so far — and employees not being laid off. That could change, Madonna said, if the unfinished state budget causes fiscal woes.

“The fact of the matter is most voters are not into it because nothing has changed in their lives. Nothing,” Madonna said. “[The state is] spending the money. All the programs are running. They haven’t figured out how to pay for it.” Still, Wolf seems to have sunk some since the poll in February, perhaps because of the prolonged budget impasse in Harrisburg.

Forty-two percent of those polled said they had a “somewhat or strongly unfavorable” view of Wolf, up from 34 percent in February. Thirty-six percent had a “strongly or somewhat favorable” view of Wolf, down from 41 percent in February. The numbers for Sen. Bob Casey, who is also seeking reelection in 2018, held steady from previous polls. Forty-five percent had a “strongly or somewhat favorable” view of Casey, while 24 percent had a “somewhat or strongly unfavorable” view.

State Sen. Scott Wagner, a York County Republican challenging Wolf, and U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, a Luzerne County Republican challenging Casey, barely registered in the poll. For Wagner, 77 percent didn’t know enough about him to offer an opinion. That number was 68 percent for Barletta. “This is typical,” Madonna said. “The average voter in Pennsylvania does not know members of the legislature or Congress that don’t represent them directly, and a fair number of them don’t recognize those who do represent them directly.”

Madonna predicted that name recognition for Wagner and Barletta — and other Republicans challenging Wolf and Casey — will rise once they start advertising their campaigns on television. Results of the poll, conducted for the Inquirer and Daily News and other media clients, are subject to a margin of error of plus or minus 6.2 percentage points. — **Philadelphia Daily News**

