

Broadband Roundtable

The Economics of Being Connected: A discussion on the challenges facing broadband infrastructure in West Virginia

Wednesday, May 27, 2015

Senator Shelley Moore Capito's (R-W.Va.) remarks as prepared for delivery:

“Good morning, thank you for joining me today for an important discussion about the future of our state.

“High-speed internet access is a pillar of our 21st Century infrastructure and a gateway to economic growth in rural America.

“Unfortunately, for all the potential benefits that broadband can offer to rural America, and states like West Virginia, not having this important service can place an almost insurmountable barrier to economic development.

“We are here today to discuss overcoming this barrier and creating a West Virginia that is connected and has the tools it needs to compete and thrive.

“Thank you to our panelists for taking the time to share your expertise with us today.

“Tony Simental– *West Virginia's State GIS Coordinator*. He is going to walk us through the data of served and unserved communities in West Virginia.

“Shane Whitehair - Executive Director of Region VII Planning and Development Council. He will be discussing the regional broadband strategic plan, and the challenges the state faces in deploying broadband.

“Mark DeFalco - Telecommunications Initiative Manager with the Appalachian Regional Commission. Mark will speak with us today about ARC's role in West Virginia.

“Ryan Palmer - *Division Chief, Federal Communications Commission, Wireline Competition Bureau, Telecommunications Access Policy Division*. Ryan, a native of

West Virginia, will give us an overview of the Connect America Fund and how it will benefit our state.

“Richard Jenkins - *Field Representative with Rural Utilities Service*. Richard serves as the ‘boots on the ground’ in West Virginia for the USDA’s Rural Utilities Service program.

“Kenneth Kelly - Kenneth is a small business owner here in West Virginia. He is the owner of Kelly Surveying in Elkins and he will speak to us about how broadband connectivity influences his business.

“Dr. Margaret Jaynes - Vice Chair of West Virginia Telehealth Alliance, will speak about telemedicine and how connectivity is critical for rural areas to access care.

“In the ever-evolving global economy, our ability to compete depends on our capacity to adapt and innovate.

“A recent study by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) indicates that 56 percent of West Virginia residents do not have access to broadband services that meet its benchmarks.

“In rural areas, this number is as high as 74 percent.

“Sadly, this is among the worst of all states in the country.

“I find these statistics concerning to the future development of our state.

“Our communities, especially those in rural areas, have not been able to keep up with national standards in availability or adoptability of broadband.

“We must ensure that our state has the necessary tools to succeed, including access to broadband.

“Broadband is critical for developing businesses, improving education, and sharing ideas across boundaries.

“When I was sworn into the Senate and outlined my top priorities for strengthening West Virginia, improving broadband was at the top of that list.

“I am committed to using my position to bring more attention and resources to the table.

“In March, I introduced bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

“This legislation authorizes \$100 million annually over the next five years, including \$10 million a year to improve rural broadband services.

“As the only state that is entirely within the Appalachian region, West Virginia has benefitted from the Appalachian Regional Commission’s development assistance in rural areas

“I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Senate to determine what other bipartisan actions we can take.

“A big part of my job will be ensuring that federal funding is used efficiently and effectively, as well as bringing together the right public and private sector players.

“Additionally, today, I am announcing my Capito Connect plan, which outlines three steps for improving broadband access in West Virginia.

“First, we need to understand the benefits of a connected West Virginia:

“By listening to our communities, we can build a West Virginia-specific plan for achieving widespread broadband that meets the unique demands of our state.

“Second, we need to foster collaboration between government and the private sector:

“Broadband access will be the result of partnerships between private, local, state and federal agencies and organizations.

“Fostering collaboration will help eliminate duplicate and outdated programs so that West Virginia can efficiently deliver broadband services to communities.

“And, finally, we need to promote economic growth through innovation:

“Broadband should be easily available and affordable for all West Virginians.

“This will require creative solutions to accommodate broadband users across all sectors, including schools, businesses and private citizens.

“Through innovative thinking and implementation, West Virginia will achieve the connectivity that will help boost our economy.

“The Capito Connect Plan is a roadmap for bringing affordable, high-speed internet access to every home, business and classroom in West Virginia.

“Along with this plan, I am launching a listening tour to hear from individuals and organizations around the state about how to best tackle this challenge.

“I encourage all West Virginians to share their broadband story with me by attending one of these listening sessions, submitting a comment on my website or writing to my office.

“Improving broadband in a rural state like West Virginia is no small task.

“It will require time, investment and cooperation between the businesses community and all levels of government.

“Together, we can tackle this challenge and seize the potential broadband has to offer West Virginia.

“I look forward to today’s discussion as a first step in the Capito Connect plan.

“I would like to thank all of you in the audience.

“We have many of the broadband providers here today. It is tremendously important that we work together toward a solution.

“We also are joined by representatives from schools, libraries and other interested parties today. This effort will require everyone working together in a productive manner in order to accomplish our goal of connecting West Virginia.”

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