



Wisconsin's Broadband Association®

WSTA UPDATE



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WSTA Update February 19, 2019

Legislative and Political

[White House releases strategy to increase broadband access](#)

The White House detailed its approach to expand broadband access, especially to rural areas, through its multi-agency American Broadband Initiative (ABI). The report was led by Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. Under the strategy, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) will spend \$600 million on rural broadband projects. Additionally, other agencies will take steps to streamline permitting and deployment, such as a Department of Interior plan to publicize information about towers on federal land that will be available to service providers to install equipment.

[Lobbying groups spent \\$70 million over latest legislative session](#)

Lobbying organizations in Wisconsin spent just under \$8 million more on their efforts influencing policy in the 2017-18 session than they did the session prior, according to data submitted to the state's Ethics Commission. Initial figures reported Friday show nearly 800 lobbying organizations racked up about \$70 million and the equivalent of about 15,585 days, or 43 years, of work attempting to sway the course of Wisconsin lawmakers and officials.

[2020 presidential hopeful and 'senator next door' Amy Klobuchar campaigns in Eau Claire](#)

For Democratic U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, the path to the 2020 presidential nomination goes right through the Midwest. Klobuchar opened her first campaign swing of the race Saturday by making her first stop in Wisconsin, a slight detour before heading to the traditional first-in-the-nation caucus state of Iowa. Klobuchar came to SHIFT Cyclery & Coffee Bar in downtown Eau Claire, where she was greeted by a few hundred people who jammed into the space, a vivid display of Democratic election fever 14 months before the state's presidential primary.

[Scott Walker gets a new gig charging up to \\$25,000 per speech](#)

Former Republican Gov. Scott Walker has a new gig charging five figures to give speeches about politics and his time in public office in Wisconsin. Walker announced Thursday he would be joining Worldwide Speakers Group, which coordinates speaking engagements for former White House press secretary Sean Spicer, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina. Walker's speaking fee ranges between \$15,000 and \$25,000 per engagement. According to the group's website.

[USDA's Anne Hazlett leaves for White House position](#)

Anne Hazlett will be leaving her rural development post to take on a new role at the White House addressing opioid abuse in rural communities. Secretary Sonny Perdue will look for a new undersecretary for rural development, a position reinstated by the 2018 farm bill. After serving as assistant to the secretary for rural development at USDA, Hazlett is headed to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. She'll head up the council's work on addressing substance abuse in rural communities, which involves interagency coordination and building grassroots strategies.

Regulatory and Industry

[FCC Adopts Legacy Universal Service Fund Phase-Out Plan for CAF II Auction Areas](#)

As expected, the FCC today adopted a Universal Service Fund phase-out plan for areas of price cap territories in which the incumbent carrier declined Connect America Fund broadband funding offered in 2015. Funding for the majority of those areas was awarded to competitive carriers including rural local exchange carriers, rural electric cooperatives, broadband wireless providers and others. In addition, some of those areas received no winning bid and will continue to be served by the incumbent until other arrangements can be made. Related: [FCC Gets Set to Adopt Legacy USF Phase-Out Plan for CAF II Auction Areas](#)

[Pai: 5G Future Is a Wired One with Promise for Rural America](#)

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai addressed the NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association membership today in New Orleans, offering wide-ranging views of important rural broadband policy matters. His remarks included reference to a 5G future that is very much about wires and not just wireless. Pai received a warm welcome from the crowd of rural broadband providers, most of whom are traditional rural telcos who now provide both wired and wireless broadband in high-cost rural areas. Much of that warm welcome derived from a recently adopted FCC order on universal service that the chairman says brings "certainty and sufficiency" to the program which helps fund rural broadband networks. Pai was interviewed by NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield, who encouraged the audience multiple times to thank Pai for pushing these reforms through.

[NTCA Announces Smart Rural Community Grant Recipients](#)

At its annual Rural Telecom Industry Meeting and EXPO (RTIME) in New Orleans, La., last week, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association announced four Smart Rural CommunitySM Collaboration Challenge grant recipients as part of the association's initiative to highlight and support efforts that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business. The Collaboration Challenge grants promote broadband-enabled solutions for communities and support collaborative efforts in economic development, education, energy, health care and public safety. The SRC Collaboration Challenge grant recipients include WSTA member Nelson Communications Cooperative (DBA Ntec) with a grant for a pilot program that will provide broadband-enabled elder care services.

[NTIA partners with 8 states for better broadband coverage map](#)

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration announced this week new partnerships with eight states to "broaden and update" the national broadband availability map. The participating states — California, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Utah and West Virginia — will provide NTIA with data and other resources to improve the accuracy and completeness of the federal

government's National Broadband Map. The Federal Communications Commission decommissioned the map last December after finding both its coverage data and mapping platform "dated."

[USDA ReConnect Rural Broadband Deadlines Extended](#)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is extending the deadlines for applications for its Rural eConnectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect Program). The USDA said the deadlines for the program have been pushed back to no earlier than May 31 or later from the previous deadlines, which began in April, in order to give potential applicants adequate time to access technical assistance from USDA staff and its partners. The new USDA ReConnect deadlines for grant, loan, and grant-loan combination applications will be posted in the Federal Register in late February. "We've seen such strong interest in ReConnect from rural telecommunications providers and utility cooperatives, that we want to be sure there's enough time for them to put solid applications together for these innovative funding opportunities," said Bette Brand, acting administrator for USDA's Rural Utilities Service, in a prepared statement. "The USDA team stands ready to assist with engineering and business plans, to be sure these new Federal funds are as impactful as possible."

[AT&T Does a Flip Flop on Fixed 5G, Now Sees It "Unequivocably" a Landline Broadband Replacement](#)

Within three to five years, fixed 5G wireless will "unequivocably" be a landline broadband replacement product, said AT&T Chairman and CEO Randall Stephenson on the company's earnings call today. That's a big departure from last year, when AT&T Chief Financial Officer John Stephens expressed considerable skepticism about the idea of an AT&T fixed wireless offering. "In a general residential broadband solution, the economics for us don't seem to work," Stephens said at that time. Stephenson's comments today were substantially more optimistic. According to Stephenson, concerns about fixed wireless traditionally have focused on a lack of capacity, but that won't be a problem for 5G – at least not 5G in the millimeter wave band.

Broadband and Internet

[Arlington Spent \\$4.1 Million on a 10-Mile Dark Fiber Network, But No One's Using It](#)

Four years ago, Arlington officials spent \$4.1 million to build a 10-mile fiber optic network aimed at allowing local businesses to get cheaper access to higher-speed internet — since then, the fiber has just sat in the ground, almost totally unused. At the time, county leaders championed the construction of the "dark fiber" network as a transformative step for Arlington. Though the county is barred by state law from offering internet service itself, officials envisioned smaller internet service providers working with local tech firms to "light" the fiber, providing county businesses with a powerful new option to access the internet at blazing-fast speeds.

[Op-Ed: Google Fiber's Louisville pullout just latest example of bad deal for taxpayers](#)

Google Fiber's pullout in Louisville is just the latest example of the tech behemoth's trail of broken promises to cities eager to accommodate the company and its gigabit-internet plans. Google Fiber announced earlier this month in a blog post complete with a crying emoji (probably representing taxpayers' woes) that it would not complete its project to provide the ultra-high-fast connections in Kentucky's largest city. If that wasn't cute enough, the company gave Louisville a virtual face slap by pointing out the lessons it learned there "made us better in our other Google Fiber cities." "We're not living up to the high standards we set for ourselves, or the standards we've demonstrated in other Google Fiber cities," the blog post said.

[AT&T Plans to Test 5G with AirGig, Seeks AirGig Manufacturers](#)

AT&T plans to test 5G in combination with the AirGig fixed broadband technology that the carrier developed in house. The 5G AirGig plans came to light in an AT&T policy paper in which the carrier also said it had "initiated discussions with technology suppliers" about testing and building commercial-grade AirGig equipment. AT&T has been testing its AirGig technology to provide gigabit broadband connectivity for several years. The technology is designed for deployment on powerline infrastructure but is considerably different from the broadband powerline technology that failed to find commercial success a decade or so ago. AirGig uses the power lines as a waveguide to restrict how much waves can expand over distance, thereby minimizing energy loss.

[Broadband-only Households to Reach 40.8M by 2023](#)

As consumers continue to cut the pay TV cord, broadband-only households could nearly double to 40.8 million by 2023 from their current level of about 23.3 million homes, according to Kagan, a media research group within S&P Global Market Intelligence. "The steep upward trend due to 'cord-cutting' is not surprising given the abundance of online video services on the market, although this could be a circular argument, with more companies jumping on the streaming video bandwagon in response to the growing broadband-only market," said senior Kagan research analyst Tony Lenoir, in a statement.

[71% of U.S. Broadband Households Own a Connected Entertainment Device](#)

Parks Associates today released a new whitepaper, Changing Dynamics of the Smart Home: Opportunities for Service Providers, which reveals that 71% of U.S. broadband households own a connected entertainment device. The whitepaper, sponsored by Calix, examines strategies for service providers to deliver a successful smart home experience that incorporates support, security, privacy protection, and a variety of personalized value propositions. "The average U.S. broadband household owns more than ten IoT devices, crossing entertainment, smart home, and health use cases," said Denise Ernst, Vice President, Parks Associates. "These trends, combined with innovations in cloud technologies and service provision, create real opportunities for service providers to enter the smart home space with offerings that provide flexible support options and protections for a household's data and privacy."

Cellular and Wireless

[US Mobile Phones Flooded with Robocalls](#)

Americans received 26.3 billion robocalls on their mobile phones in 2018, according to Hiya. That was 46 percent more than in 2017. Consumers received an average of 10 spam calls per month, Hiya found. The top unwanted call in the U.S. was for the Wangiri, or "one-ring" scam, which grew 250 percent year over year. Seven of the top area codes targeted by spammers were in Texas, Hiya said. The top three were 214 in Dallas, 817 in Fort Worth, and 210 in San Antonio. Robocalls purporting to be from debt collectors made up 15 of the top 20 toll-free numbers used, Hiya reported. The remaining five were used by telemarketers. "Obviously, people do not pay for voice telecommunications to place themselves on robocall lists," said Michael Jude, program manager at Stratecast/Frost & Sullivan.

[5G Becoming Secret Advertising Weapon For AT&T, Verizon](#)

Mobile speeds reaching 5G connectivity will continue to improve options for brands when it comes to supporting advanced advertising and marketing technologies. The ability to collect more data is another benefit

of 5G, Thomas Barnett, director of marketing and thought leadership at Cisco, told Digital Daily News. He explained how the data can be captured by the phone and provider when consumers opt in. "5G will open a whole new area of mobile understanding and personalization that should be of interest to advertisers and how they develop and deliver campaigns," Barnett said. Smartphones, which have become the center of all communications and entertainment, will account for about 54% of total device connections, but will drive more than 90% of internet traffic by 2022, explained Shruti Jain, senior analyst, Cisco.

[Google Pixel is the fastest-growing US smartphone brand w/ 43% year-over-year growth](#)

While it's still not seeing anything close to the success of the iPhone or even Samsung's Galaxy lineup, Google has started to finally see success with its Pixel lineup over the past year. Now, a new report reveals that Google Pixel is the fastest-growing smartphone brand in the United States. A report from Strategy Analytics states that Google's Pixel brand is the fastest-growing brand in the United States as far as smartphones go as of Q4 2018. You've probably heard that detail floating around over the past couple of days, but in the full report, Strategy Analytics reveals that Google's in-house smartphone brand grew a whopping 43% since Q4 of 2017.

IPTV and Video

[Wisconsin Video Provider Moving to InnoStream™ MG-TV](#)

Amherst, WI – Amherst Communications General Manager Rick Letto says his communications company in east central Wisconsin is upgrading their linear video middleware to Innovative Systems because it provides an easier to navigate customer experience than OTT. Letto says that until OTT can mimic what his customers are used to, traditional linear video is still what the majority of Amherst subscribers are most comfortable with. He says, "They just want to push a button on their remote and watch TV." Letto added that he likes where Innovative is going with the Innostream™ MG-TV platform and looks forward to having the option of giving customers video delivery choices that best suit their lifestyles.

[TDS, Nexstar End Retrans Battle](#)

TDS Telecom said it has reached a retransmission consent agreement with Nexstar Media Group, returning the broadcaster's television stations to its customers in eight states. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Nexstar stations went dark to about 50,000 TDS customers on Dec. 31 in Indiana, Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, Tennessee, Colorado, Utah and Nevada. The new comprehensive deal will return Nexstar's ABC, CBS and Fox-affiliated stations and others to TDS subscribers in time to see the Super Bowl, which airs on CBS this Sunday.

[TDS Continues Expansion Plans, Adds TDS TV to New Markets](#)

TDS is moving forward with expansion plans that include fiber broadband and IPTV. The latest example includes expansion of TDS TV to almost 2,200 addresses in southern Wisconsin. The new offerings, which were made possible by ongoing network investments and upgrades, will be available in Albany, Blanchardville, Browntown, Juda, Monticello and South Wayne. The service already is available in Monroe, which is nearby. "We're delighted to be expanding the availability of TDS TV to the residents of these communities," Julie Maiers, vice president of Marketing and Product Development at TDS, said in a press release. "It's the same great service their neighbors have been talking about with a whole-home DVR, wireless set-top boxes, on-demand options, and more—plus fast internet speeds too."