



WSTA UPDATE

Wisconsin's Broadband Association®



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WSTA Update September 29, 2019

Legislative and Political

WSTA applauds Bipartisan Vote on Rural Broadband Investment Legislation

Wisconsin's premier telecommunications industry association applauds the Assembly Committee on Rural Development vote in support of Assembly Bill 344 (AB 344). The legislation facilitates rural broadband deployment through targeted tax exemptions for investments in rural or underserved communities. "WSTA is extremely pleased to see a unanimous, bipartisan vote and recognize it as an important step in the process." said Bill Esbeck, executive director of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA). "This legislation helps our members stretch their working capital in rural areas, where there are miles per customer as opposed to customers per mile. Simply put, the bill will help connect more broadband customers in rural and underserved Wisconsin." Related: [Representative Quinn, Mosaic Telecom officers testify in Madison](#)

Below: Representative Romaine Quinn with Mosaic CEO Domenico Fornaro and CFO Eric Pelle; Nsight's Larry Lueck, TDS Telecom's Jean Pauk, Domenico Fornaro, Eric Pelle and WSTA's Bill Esbeck at the public hearing on AB 344.



Wisconsin lawmakers could force drivers to put down their phones

On the heels of Minnesota passing a law forcing drivers to put down their cell phones, Wisconsin could join the growing number of states going "hands free." Rep. John Spiros, R-Marshfield, said he's drafting legislation that would expand the state's hands-free law — which currently only applies to work zones — to include all

roadways. He said the bill could be finalized this month. If passed, the law would be a considerable tightening from the state's current ban on texting while driving. Legislation would only allow a driver to touch their phone once for hands-free use. Holding the phone to talk, text, send emails or for any other use would be prohibited.

[In Congressional Campaign Launch, Tiffany Takes A Dig at Democrats](#)

The special election in Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District has its first official contender. State Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, announced his candidacy Tuesday in several stops around different parts of the district. In August, Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Wausau, announced he would resign from the office as his wife, Fox News commentator Rachel Campos Duffy, faces complications in her pregnancy. Duffy's resignation is effective Sept. 23, and a special election will follow. In morning events in Rhinelander and Schofield, Tiffany acknowledged the national attention the race will bring, praising Republican President Donald Trump and repeatedly referencing Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Those events were to be followed by stops in Cadott and Hudson on Tuesday, and Rice Lake, Hayward and Superior on Wednesday. Related: [Duffy's Resignation In Trump Country Has Both Parties Ready For Battle](#)

[Long-serving Wisconsin congressman becomes latest GOP lawmaker to not seek reelection](#)

Wisconsin Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, a Republican who is the second-most senior member of the House, announced on Wednesday that he will not seek reelection in 2020. Sensenbrenner said he will retire in January 2021, at the end of his current term. He will become the longest-serving Wisconsin congressman in the state's history late next year when he reaches 42 years of service, overcoming former Democratic Rep. David Obey's record of 41 years, nine months and three days. He is the 13th Republican lawmaker to announce their plans for departure in recent weeks, adding to a growing list of House GOP retirements. Before running for the House, Sensenbrenner, a Republican stalwart, served in the Wisconsin state legislature for 10 years. "When I began my public service in 1968, I said I would know when it was time to step back. After careful consideration, I have determined at the completion of this term, my 21st term in Congress, it will be that time," Sensenbrenner said in a statement Wednesday evening. The congressman previously chaired the House Judiciary Committee and the House Science Committee. He is known for introducing the USA Patriot Act in 2001. Related: ['Let's get to work:' Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald announces run for Congress](#)

[Wisconsin Senate leader Scott Fitzgerald, who is running for Congress, floats new tax cut](#)

The leading Republican in the state Senate wants to use new revenue that could be used for a rainy day to cut taxes next spring — potential spending that comes at a time when the Federal Reserve is making moves to stave off an economic recession. Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald is floating the possibility of a new tax cut as he launches a campaign for a seat in Congress representing the deeply conservative 5th Congressional District. Fitzgerald said in an appearance Sunday on WISN (Channel 12) promoting his run for Congress that if the state has enough socked away he would like to put Wisconsin families "in a much better position" through a tax cut. "I think we're going to be able to do it," Fitzgerald said. State lawmakers are set to see \$753 million more in tax revenue than previously anticipated. Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and one of the GOP leaders of Legislature's finance committee have said most if not all of the unexpected windfall should stay in the state's rainy-day fund.

Regulatory and Industry

[Rural Telecom Economic Impact Report: \\$10 Billion Impact in 2017](#)

Rural telecom companies supported \$10 billion in economic activity in 2017, according to a new report from the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS). The rural telecom economic impact report also found that rural telecom

companies contributed over 77,000 jobs that year. The FRS is a non-profit organization that provides education, information, products and programming to support rural telecom companies. The FRS findings were based on information gathered from approximately two thirds of the members of NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association. NTCA members are rural telecom service providers. Collectively, NTCA members employ more than 77,000 people nationwide. Those people received more than \$2.3 billion in compensation in 2017.

[Eleven Rural Broadband Providers Earn National NTCA Smart Rural Communities Showcase Awards](#)

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association, the premier national association representing nearly 850 independent, community-based telecommunications companies, today recognized 11 companies in rural areas of the United States that have earned Smart Rural Communities Showcase Awards as part of the association’s campaign to recognize projects that enhance quality of life in small towns using robust broadband networks. With the announcement of these 11 new award winners today, NTCA will have honored more than 80 rural broadband providers as Showcase Awardees since the program launched in 2013. The goal of the NTCA Smart Rural Communities program is to celebrate the commitment of rural broadband providers and forward-thinking community members to drive growth and create opportunities within their communities. Smart Rural Communities provides educational programming, gig-speed certification, a brand platform for rural communities and their telecom providers, matching grant resources and the Showcase Awards to recognize top-performing communities. *Below: WSTA member Lynxx Networks CEO Jim Costello accepted the NTCA Smart Rural Community Award at the NTCA Fall Conference last week.*



[FCC moves toward June 2020 auction of CBRS spectrum](#)

The wireless industry now has a proposed date for when the licensed portion of the 3.5 GHz Citizens Broadband Radio Services (CBRS) band goes up for auction: June 25, 2020. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced in a blog post on Wednesday that the full commission will vote at its September 26 meeting to seek comment on draft procedures for an auction of the 70 MHz of spectrum that will be licensed. The unlicensed portion of the band, dubbed General Authorized Access (GAA), is expected to start hosting commercial services beginning this month. “Making more spectrum available for the commercial marketplace is a central

plank of the Commission's 5G FAST strategy," Pai stated, noting that the commission already completed two spectrum auctions this year and will begin a third on December 10 for more millimeter wave.

[FCC Authorizes \\$112 Million in Rural Broadband Funding to CAF II Auction Winners](#)

The FCC today authorized approximately \$112 million in rural broadband funding over 10 years to entities that won funding in the Connect America Fund CAF II auction. The auction awarded a total of \$1.488 billion to help cover the cost of bringing broadband to high-cost rural areas where service is not available today. Today's announcement is the fifth CAF II funding authorization announcement that the FCC has released, bring total authorized funding to over \$1 billion. The vast majority of funding released today will go to two entities that will deploy fixed wireless technology: Cal.net Inc. will receive over \$50.5 million to deploy service to 20,859 homes and businesses in California, most of which will receive service at speeds of at least 100 Mbps downstream and 20 Mbps upstream. W.A.T.C.H. TV will receive nearly \$53.4 million to bring service to 23,957 rural homes and businesses in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, most of which will be able to get speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps. Seven other entities are on the authorized list released today, including: Illinois Fiber Connect (Illinois); ShawneeLEC (Illinois); Casey Mutual Telephone (Iowa); Consolidated Telephone (Minnesota); Wikstrom Telephone (Minnesota); Echo Wireless Broadband (New Mexico); Wood County Telephone (Wisconsin).

[To challenge FCC's bad broadband maps, groups demand a regular process](#)

At a House subcommittee hearing on Wednesday, industry stakeholders, broadband advocacy representatives and legislators acknowledged shortcomings in the Federal Communications Commission's current broadband mapping strategy and built consensus for a consistent and formal process to challenge the commission's data. The hearing, held by the House subcommittee on energy and commerce, was held to examine five bills surrounding the FCC's data-collection and mapping process, which has been scrutinized in recent months by Congress and state employees eager to capitalize on a \$20 billion rural digital opportunity fund and more than \$600 million in USDA funding for rural regions without broadband. Though these bills and the FCC's own efforts to improve the mapping are a positive step forward, argued Shirley Bloomfield, a witness at the hearing and the chief executive officer of NTCA, also known as The Rural Broadband Association, establishing a challenge process that occurs at regular intervals is the most important thing Congress can do to ensure that rural broadband funding goes where it is needed the most.

[FCC creates two 'innovation zones' to test next-gen wireless](#)

The FCC is backing up its push for next-gen wireless by setting up entire areas devoted to advancing the technology. The agency has created two "innovation zones" in New York City and Salt Lake City that will serve as testbeds for 5G and other wireless formats. Participants can run multiple experiments under a single approval, even if they're not related. Ideally, companies and researchers can push the boundaries of cellular, broadband or local networking without interfering with everyday service. Testers have to honor the FCC's guidelines for a given zone, including the authority of the zone administrator, and provide early notice for their projects.

[AT&T Responds to Sinclair Blackout Threat](#)

On Friday afternoon, Sinclair Broadcast Group distributed a somewhat sensationalized press release offering breathless commentary over how its 136 broadcast TV stations could be prevented from reaching subscribers of any AT&T-owned television service come Friday (9/27). A new retransmission consent agreement between Sinclair and AT&T seems unlikely, given the verbage lobbed at AT&T by Sinclair. Now, AT&T is offering its own fighting words in a matter that's only escalating.

[AT&T, DT, and Telefónica Trumpet Cost-Saving CO Pod](#)

Telecom operators moving to virtualized, cloud-based architectures can save 40% in capex and 25% in opex, according to a study from Arthur D. Little, AT&T, Deutsche Telekom, and Telefónica. The companies released the study at the Open Networking Foundation (ONF) Connect event this week, and during a panel the three operators discussed what they call a “Central Office pod” or CO pod architecture. It’s essentially an updated version of ONF’s Central Office Rearchitected as a Data Center (CORD) program that is also influenced by the Open Compute Project’s work to drive web-scale technologies into data centers. CO pod uses a modular approach, and it replaces traditional proprietary networking equipment with general-purpose hardware and SDN managed by standard IT automation tools. This standardized, disaggregated technology is designed to meet operator challenges pertaining to demand growing faster than revenues, technology convergence, and a growing desire to take advantage of a wider range of third-party vendors.

Broadband and Internet

[Microsoft, Nextlink Partner on Rural High-Speed Internet](#)

Microsoft and Nextlink will partner to bring high-speed broadband internet access to parts of rural Oklahoma. Nextlink doesn't have a timetable for when service will be available or where it will be deployed, but a spokesman said the company will evaluate where Nextlink can place infrastructure using a combination of fixed wireless, TV white space and related technologies. White space is the unused frequencies between television stations. The Federal Communications Commission has unlocked the spectrum for wireless providers outside of broadcast media. Using white space and fixed wireless networks are cheaper and easier to deploy than DSL, cable and satellite options.

[Fiber Broadband Association study estimates price tag for passing 90% of U.S. households by 2029](#)

The Fiber Broadband Association has collaborated with strategy consulting firm Cartesian to investigate how much it would cost to pass 90% of U.S. households by 2029. The price would be about \$70 billion more than has been spent so far, the association says in the study. If you’re looking to save some money, \$52 billion would enable 80% of U.S. homes to be passed, according to the study. The study notes that fiber homes passed in the U.S. at the end of last year numbered 39.2 million, with current momentum expected to drive that figure to 65.1 million by 2025 – approximately 50% of U.S. households. A demand for better broadband services, the willingness of more service providers to accept the longer-term benefits of all-fiber networks, and government efforts to lower barriers to deployment as well as offer subsidies, such as the CAF program, have proven catalysts for fiber to the premises (FTTP) deployment growth, according to the study.

[Uniti Group Closes on \\$319M Bluebird Network Sale Leaseback](#)

Infrastructure REIT Uniti Group has closed on its previously announced sale-leaseback and fiber acquisition with Bluebird Network. Total consideration for Bluebird’s fiber network is \$319 million, of which \$175 million is funded by Uniti in cash and \$144 million in upfront lease payments from Macquarie Infrastructure Partners, which is joining forces with Uniti Group through an OpCo-PropCo partnership. With the deal closed, Uniti has acquired 178,000 fiber strand miles in the Midwest across Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, and Oklahoma. In addition, Uniti completed the sale of its Uniti Fiber Midwest operations to Macquarie, while retaining ownership of its existing Midwest fiber network. Uniti is leasing the Bluebird fiber network and its Midwest fiber network, on a combined basis, to Macquarie under a long-term triple net lease.

Cellular and Wireless

[U.S. Cellular's New 'Fairness' Campaign to Include Rural 5G Component](#)

Amid slowing growth and increasingly heated competition, U.S. Cellular unveiled a new branding campaign centered around the notion that it provides fairness in terms of its network, its pricing and its employee activities in its markets. And perhaps not surprisingly, the company said there will be a 5G component to its message. "It's time to reintroduce ourselves to consumers and to give them unique and compelling reasons to choose and stay with U.S. Cellular," Jay Spenchian, the operator's SVP of marketing, said in a release.

[AT&T, Verizon Share Bragging Rights in Rural Mobile Report](#)

Verizon does the best job of connecting customers in rural areas to LTE, while AT&T has the fastest download speeds in rural areas, according to a new report from mobile analytics provider Opensignal. As the report notes, 97% of the U.S. land mass is considered rural, and rural areas are home to 19.3% of the U.S. population. Verizon had the top spot on 4G connectivity in all three types of U.S. rural areas, including "fringe" areas, which are close to urban areas; "distant" areas, which are more rural; and the most rural "remote" areas. Definitions of and data about these areas came from the National Center for Education Statistics. In fringe areas, Verizon users connected to 4G 95.1% of the time, while Verizon users in distant and remote areas connected 89.3% and 83.5% of the time, respectively. Verizon was followed by T-Mobile, AT&T and Sprint, in that order, in all three types of rural areas.

IPTV and Video

[Apple TV Plus: Launch date, price, shows and movies to expect](#)

Apple has finally explained what Apple TV Plus is all about (well, almost all about). With a reported budget of \$6 billion to rope in some of Hollywood's biggest stars, Apple TV Plus will launch Nov. 1 for \$5 a month. People who buy a new Apple gadget get to watch free for a year, while everyone else qualifies for a seven-day free trial. Apple TV Plus was first announced at a star-studded event in March, but the company stayed mum about the crucial details until its iPhone event in September. Apple TV Plus, the Netflix-like subscription service featuring Apple's original TV shows and movies, will launch with nine confirmed titles, including a drama starring Reese Witherspoon and Jennifer Aniston, a post-apocalyptic thriller starring Jason Momoa, a comedy about poet Emily Dickinson starring Hailee Steinfeld and a book-focused series with Oprah Winfrey called Oprah's Book Club.

[MoffettNathanson: Video Cord Cutting Drives Cable Broadband ARPU Growth](#)

Four of the nation's largest cable companies saw broadband revenue growth between 8.1% and 12% over the last two years, but how they achieved that growth varied, note financial analysts at MoffettNathanson LLC in a new research note analyzing cable broadband ARPU and subscriber data. While new subscribers were the biggest contributor to overall growth for Charter and Comcast, growth in average revenue per user (ARPU) was the key factor for Altice USA and CableOne – an achievement that the researchers attribute, in part, to higher video subscriber losses for those companies.

[NBCUniversal unveils Peacock, its upcoming streaming service](#)

NBCUniversal announced Tuesday that its new streaming service will be called Peacock — and that it will come with a colorful library of content. The service, which is set to roll out in April of 2020, will launch with over

15,000 hours of content from NBCUniversal's shows and films, the company announced on Tuesday. Peacock will be the exclusive streaming home for popular sitcoms like "The Office" and "Parks and Recreation." Blockbusters from Universal Pictures such as movies in the "Fast & Furious" series and reboots of classic series like "Saved by the Bell" and "Battlestar Galactica" will also be included in the service, the company said.

[Roku's new devices include tiny Express and faster Ultra with customizable remote](#)

Roku is unveiling its fall 2019 lineup of streaming devices today, with the most two significant spots filled by a more powerful Ultra set-top box and a revamped Express streaming dongle that can be powered entirely by the USB port on around 98 percent of TVs. The new streamers follow Roku's announcement of its first soundbar, with streaming software built right in, earlier this month. Roku remains ahead of Amazon's Fire TV platform, Chromecast, and Apple TV as the choice for streaming in the living room. The company has 30.5 million active accounts (customers who've streamed within the last 30 days) as of Q2.