

Increasing Broadband Service in Your Community

by Dave Garb, Legislative Committee Chair

Warning, it is all around you! There is nowhere to hide from it! And it is on its way to the 2023 JAG Conference.

**It's the B-word! BROADBAND!!!
Yes, It Is Everywhere, Be Prepared! or Be Left Out!**

In 2021, the federal government passed the American Infrastructure Act which approved billions of dollars to improve broadband deployment throughout the country. That money will flow from the Federal Government and be distributed by each state in a major goal to build-out broadband everywhere, including in the rural areas.

On May 18th, during the JAG Conference Keynote Luncheon, we explore the ways all municipalities can access the money, and what to do with it once it arrives at the local level. Our panel of experts, Robert Boyle, CEO Planet Networks, Marilyn Davis, Senior Director of Government Affairs, Altice, Mike Wassenaar, President of the ACM, the Alliance for Community Media, and Mike Lynch, Legislative & Regulatory Affairs Director for NATOA, the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, will guide you on a successful path to help you acquire a piece of this funding for your community.

For any of you who are thinking about what chance your municipality has at obtaining some of this funding, your chances are pretty good. Congress has made broadband a major priority and wants everybody in the US to have it. To make this agenda come to fruition, the House's Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology held a hearing this past April 19th, entitled "*Breaking Barriers: Streamlining Permitting to Expedite Broadband Deployment.*"

According to the Committee's Majority Staff Memo, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF16/20230419/115750/HHRG-118-IF16-20230419-SD094.pdf> the hearing took up more than 30 additional bills aimed at what are described as the 'Federal Barriers', 'State and Local Government Obstacles', as well as, 'Pole Attachments (Access to Poles)' to help streamline these regulations. This is essential in order to encourage and expedite the broadband infrastructure deployment throughout the United States.

A set of questions was posed for these hearings included:

- Is attaching telecommunications equipment on municipally or cooperatively owned poles more difficult or expensive than on other poles?
- What challenges exist at the federal, state, and local levels that delay or burden broadband deployment?
- How can Congress help expedite or streamline the process for broadband deployment?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce even wrote an article highlighting what Congress must do to take action in order to accelerate the process for ensuring all Americans have access to the latest innovations in connectivity. <https://www.uschamber.com/technology/broadband/4-actions-congress-must-take-to-accelerate-access-and-adoption-of-smart-broadband-programs>.

These 4 Actions are:

- **Permitting Reform:** To ensure our infrastructure, especially broadband, is ahead of the ever-evolving technological landscape.
- **Interagency Coordination:** The Government Accountability Office noted that 15 federal agencies collectively administer over 100 programs to expand access to broadband. Congress should focus on effectively implementing existing federal broadband programs and ensuring taxpayer dollars are utilized wisely.
- **Affordable Connectivity Program Funding:** The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act established the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to provide a monthly benefit to low-income Americans. However, the IJA only provided a temporary amount of funding for the ACP, which is expected to run out in 2024. Congress must act and provide sufficient appropriations to provide certainty for program beneficiaries and participating internet service providers.
- **Prevent Overregulation:** Congress must ensure that all federal broadband programs avoid ancillary and harmful public policies such as preferences for unions, costly Buy America mandates, and patchwork networks.

If this wasn't a lot to digest, *The Community Broadband Act of 2023* was reintroduced on both sides of the Capital. New Jersey Senator Cory Booker sponsored [S.1197](#), while Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA) sponsored [H.R.2552](#).

This legislation will empower local governments to ensure their residents have equitable broadband access by removing roadblocks for public-private partnerships and locally-owned broadband providers. It will also improve internet and broadband access across the country by removing roadblocks prohibiting local communities from building their own broadband networks.

These Acts have been endorsed by NATOA.

Confusing? Maybe a little. But, as you have read, Congress is investing heavily in order to bring broadband to all Americans. It's just a matter of how to go about it correctly and spend the money wisely.

Please join us on May 18th, at the Crowne Plaza in Edison, NJ, <https://jagconference.com/>. Find out where you can secure the funds to 100% connect your community and prepare everyone for the future of Broadband.



JAG CONFERENCE

May 18, 2023

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Edison, NJ

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