



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Bridging the Digital Divide for Jobs and a Stronger Future

Senator Joe Manchin
United States Senate

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin was sworn into the United States Senate on November 15, 2010, to fill the seat left vacant by the late Senator Robert C. Byrd. For Senator Manchin, serving as West Virginia's Senator is truly an honor and a privilege.

Senator Manchin is defined by his family and the values that he learned while growing up among the hardworking men and women of West Virginia, which, over time, formed his vigilant desire to be a public servant. From his days as a state legislator and his six years as Governor to his current role, Senator Manchin has always been committed to his philosophy of "retail government" – in other words, connecting with all of his constituents and making service to them his top priority.

Senator Manchin currently serves on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the Senate Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs – four critical committees that tackle the important work of addressing our nation's energy needs, standing up for our veterans, and overseeing discretionary spending and intelligence activities.

We cannot compete, let alone even participate, in a global 21st century economy without broadband, and yet, according to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), over 500,000 West Virginians do not have access. Every day, I hear from West Virginians who are hindered by this lack of high-speed internet access in our state. From students who cannot complete their school work due to slow or non-existent internet service to born-and-raised West Virginians that are leaving home because their livelihoods are reliant on a dependable internet connection, the future of our state grows more uncertain the longer we are without adequate broadband connectivity.

When it comes to broadband deployment, our state faces unique challenges. Mountainous terrain poses an expensive burden for new buildouts and, with low population densities in rural areas, many service providers cannot and will not deploy service to these parts of the state without significant help from the federal government. But while rural broadband deployment faces significant road blocks, I am optimistic that, with enough support, we can bridge the digital divide in this country.

During my time in the Senate, increasing access to broadband in West Virginia has been one of my top priorities. I have worked to bridge the digital divide by supporting bipartisan legislation that aims to expand broadband access to West Virginians. I have also been dedicated to ensuring the FCC is held accountable to their commitment of upholding the principles of universal service, which include:

- Promoting the availability of quality services at just, reasonable and affordable rates for all consumers

- Increasing nationwide access to advanced telecommunications services
- Advancing the availability of such services to all consumers, including those in rural areas
- Increasing access to telecommunications and advanced services in schools, libraries and rural health care facilities
- Providing equitable and non-discriminatory contributions from all providers of telecommunications services for the fund supporting universal service programs

One way I have done this is by leading a congressional effort to urge the FCC to move forward with The Mobility Fund II, which will provide \$4.53 billion in federal support over ten years to expand mobile broadband coverage across the country, and was unanimously passed by the FCC last August. In June, I sent a letter to the FCC, with Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), asking them to move forward with the Remote Areas Fund and structure this program to



Each week, underscoring the importance of technology infrastructure in schools, Senator Manchin holds a Skype session with a classroom in West Virginia. Seen here: Senator Manchin speaks with Lincoln County High School students.



As a member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Senator Manchin works to ensure that federal spending is targeted toward priorities that benefit West Virginians – including broadband infrastructure

successfully reach “above extremely high-cost” areas like the nearly 12,328 locations of this nature found in West Virginia. Last February, I also introduced the Rural Telecommunications and Broadband Service Act of 2017, which calls on the FCC to form an advisory committee to define what “access to comparable services in rural America” should mean. If this legislation is enacted, the committee would develop policies and recommendations that promote deployment of broadband access in rural areas across West Virginia.

I have also proudly introduced two other bills to address broadband deficiency in areas across the country. On March 2, 2018, I’m proud to say that the Senate passed the Rural Wireless Access Act, which would require the FCC to collect valid broadband coverage data. This requirement will be incorporated into The Mobility Fund II to ensure that we are using coverage data that accurately represents the real-world experiences of West Virginians. Last year, Senator Dean Heller (R-NV)

and I introduced the Rural Broadband Deployment Streamlining Act to streamline the application process required to construct broadband infrastructure on federal lands. It would also take steps to ensure that the broadband data collected for the National Broadband Map is robust and reliable by requiring the Government Accountability Office to examine the accuracy of this data. I was thrilled to see President Trump’s commitment to rural broadband deployment through his Executive Actions announced on January 8, and I am proud to say that these actions are very much in line with the ideas found in my bill with Senator Heller.

The Administration’s inclusion of \$50 billion in its infrastructure proposal to go toward rural infrastructure investments is also encouraging and, if enacted, I am committed to working with the administration to ensure that a large portion of that money is put toward broadband deployment. Furthermore,

**United States Senator
JOE MANCHIN**

2018 JOB FAIRS

Bluefield – April 5

Keyser – April 13

Romney - TBD

Martinsburg – September 26

Parkersburg - September 28

Fairmont – October 12

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in the bipartisan budget agreement that passed the House and Senate on February 9, I was able to secure \$20 billion in funding for critical infrastructure needs like rural broadband.

While we have made some strides, the fact that roughly 30 percent of West Virginians are still without access to broadband shows there is much more work to be done. As the world becomes increasingly plugged-in and the economic landscape continues to shift toward the digital age, we must ensure that West Virginia isn’t left behind.

All West Virginians deserve fast and reliable internet service so that we can participate in our global society. As your United States Senator, I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and President Trump to ensure that we bridge the digital divide and provide internet access to all of West Virginia and our neighbors throughout rural America. ▽