

Senator Manchin's Actions To Expand Broadband Access

October 11, 2016: In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission's broadband coverage maps indicated that 99.9% of Americans had wireless coverage. In order to prove these figures were inaccurate, Senator Manchin brings then-Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler to West Virginia to see first-hand why his agency was wrong.

February 16, 2017: Senator Manchin and Senator Wicker meet with Chairman Pai to discuss the importance of a robust, reliable, and standardized data collection and challenge process.

April 12, 2017: Senator Manchin and Senator Wicker sent a letter to Chairman Pai applauding the creation of the Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force and urging the FCC to ensure that accurate maps guide the upcoming auctions.

May 11, 2017: Senator Manchin and Senator Wicker introduce the Rural Wireless Access Act which would require the FCC to collect wireless broadband coverage data that is valid, consistent, and robust.

August 3, 2017: FCC votes on Mobility Fund Order to begin the process of providing \$4.53 billion over ten years to expand mobile broadband deployment.

February 27, 2018: FCC releases their Initial Eligible Areas Map for Mobility Fund Phase II.

March 29, 2018: Senator Manchin sends a letter to Chairman Pai encouraging the FCC to work with state and local governments on the Mobility Fund II Map Challenge Process to ensure the map reflects the actual real world experience of West Virginians.

April 10, 2018: The FCC responds to Senator Manchin's request that they provide support to state and local governments by releasing a new map that shows areas where challenges have the best likelihood of success.

May 10, 2018: Senator Manchin requests a waiver from the FCC to participate in the Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process and prove their coverage map was inaccurate

May 18, 2018: Senator Manchin hosts the FCC Wireless Telecommunications Bureau's Associate Chief of Competition and Infrastructure Policy Division, Michael Janson for an FCC Mobility Fund II Challenge Process presentation in West Virginia to help stakeholders better understand the challenge process and the opportunities they have to improve the accuracy of the eligibility map.

May 25, 2018: Senator Manchin receives waiver from the FCC to participate in the Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process.

June 5, 2018: Senator Manchin hosts a Facebook Live with FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel and Aaron Cox, Chairman of the Hampshire County Broadband Initiative Council to discuss broadband access in West Virginia, Mobility Fund II and how West Virginians could challenge the FCC's map. November 26, 2018: Senator Manchin becomes only Member of Congress to formally challenge a federal broadband coverage map when he submitted a successful challenge to the Mobility Fund Phase II Initial Eligible Areas Map.

February 12, 2019: Senator Manchin announces that West Virginia will be included in the new National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) initiative that will help make sure the national broadband availability map is accurate. This came after he led the effort to secure the language the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 that authorized this pilot program.

February 14, 2019: Senator Manchin leads a bipartisan letter to the FCC Chairman Ajit Pai urging him to create a public feedback mechanism to allow consumers and states an opportunity to participate in the mapping process.

May 15, 2019: Senator Manchin introduces the Map Improvement Act of 2019 (S. 1485).

July 18, 2019: Senator Manchin sends Chairman Pai the results of speed tests his staff took in Cabins, WV that showed internet speeds were well below the FCC's definition of broadband and the advertised speed they were given by their provider. Senator Manchin also promised to continue sending results from West Virginians until the FCC establishes a user-friendly public feedback mechanism to allow West Virginians to help validate the FCC's coverage data.

August 14, 2019: Senator Manchin sends Chairman Pai the results of eight speed tests taken by West Virginians. October 10, 2019: Senator Manchin sends Chairman Pai the results of fourteen speed tests taken by West Virginians.

October 18, 2019: Senator Manchin hosts Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel in West Virginia to discuss broadband coverage in the state and the importance of creating accurate coverage maps for rural states. During their visit, Senator Manchin and Commissioner Rosenworcel hosted town halls on broadband connectivity in Romney and with Lewis County High School students and community leaders, and a roundtable at the Stonewell Jackson Hospital in Weston.

November 12, 2019: Senator Manchin sends his 100th speed test letter to Chairman Pai. To date, one hundred and six speed test results have been sent to the FCC.

November 15, 2019: Senator Manchin attends a West Virginia Broadcasters Association Meeting with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai. This meeting provided the opportunity for Senator Manchin and Chairman Pai to discuss the need for reliable broadband access, and highlight the importance of conducting speed tests in order to create accurate coverage maps that determine how much federal broadband funding West Virginia receives.

December 11, 2019: Senator Manchin, as the Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, secures language in the Secure Rural Schools program to ensure that funding can be used to address the “homework gap” so students have the ability to access the internet once they leave school—whether on a school bus, at a library, or at home.

December 12, 2019: the Senate passes Senator Manchin’s proposals to fix the country’s inaccurate broadband maps through the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technology Act (the “Broadband DATA Act”). The bill was signed by President Trump on March 23, 2020.

January 9, 2020: Senator Manchin leads a bi-partisan letter to FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai urging the FCC to focus their efforts on providing reliable broadband to rural communities before expanding 5G coverage, as indicated by the announcement of the FCC’s 5G Fund to replace the Mobility Fund Phase II program.

January 20, 2020: Senator Manchin announces a \$18.7 million broadband award for Harrison, Doddridge, Lewis, Barbour, and Upshur counties as part of USDAs ReConnect program. The investment will support a high-speed broadband infrastructure project that will create or improve rural broadband for more than 6,300 rural households and approximately 383 farms.

February 4, 2020: Senator Manchin announces a \$3 million broadband award for Hampshire County and Hardy Telecommunications through the USDAs Community Connect program to help connect an additional 600 homes, businesses, and farms.

February 10, 2020: Senator Manchin announces the launch of his new webpage where constituents can easily submit internet speed tests to the Senator. Speed test results submitted on the new webpage will be sent to Ajit Pai, Chairman of the FCC, to highlight incorrect broadband coverage maps of West Virginia and support the need for the formation of a public feedback system to better assess broadband coverage across rural states like West Virginia.

February 14, 2020: Senator Manchin passes language in the Senate Appropriators Committee urging them to keep Mobility Fund Phase II high cost set aside language in final spending bill. His language was maintained in the final bill and was signed into law the next day.

May 7, 2020: Senator Manchin introduces a bipartisan bill the Eliminating Barriers to Rural Internet Development Grant Eligibility (E-BRIDGE) Act, which would remove obstacles for broadband projects to receive Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants. Specifically, the legislation ensures that local communities can partner with the private sector and gives communities more flexibility in complying with their funding match requirements.

May 13, 2020: Senator Manchin announces the FCC's approval of Wirt County Health Services Association/Coplin Health System's application for \$274,432 to provide telehealth services to West Virginians during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of the Financial Services & General Government (FSGG) Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees the FCC's budget, Senator Manchin helped support \$200 million in funding for the telehealth pilot program through the CARES Act.

May 14, 2020: Senator Manchin launches a collaboration with Lewis County High School and FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel to encourage Lewis County High School students to submit broadband speed tests while they are learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Manchin will send these speed tests to FCC Chairman Ajit Pai to advocate for the FCC to create a public feedback system and fix their broadband coverage maps, which determine where federal funding goes to expand broadband coverage.

May 20, 2020: Senator Manchin announces the FCC's approval of Lincoln County Primary Care Center's application for \$967,304 to procure telehealth carts, network hardware and software upgrades, and diagnostic equipment to provide telehealth services to West Virginians at 18 rural sites during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of the Financial Services & General Government (FSGG) Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees the FCC's budget, Senator Manchin helped support \$200 million in funding for the telehealth pilot program through the CARES Act.

June 16, 2020: Senator Manchin questions FCC Chairman Ajit Pai on how much funding the FCC would need to fix the current broadband coverage maps, and the distribution of funding to expand broadband access during a Senate Appropriations Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) Subcommittee Hearing.

June 17, 2020: Senator Manchin applauds FCC approval of West Virginia University Health Center's application of \$780,899 for their Telehealth Program.

June 19, 2020: Senator Manchin announced \$99,999 for Shepherd University through the National Science Foundation (NSF). This funding will support bringing fiber optic connectivity to Shepherd University's campus, and improve overall access to the internet for students, staff, and faculty.

June 24, 2020: Senator Manchin applauds FCC approval of Mon Health Medical Center's application of \$283,396 for their Telehealth Program.

June 25, 2020: Senator Manchin submits over 1,000 speed tests to FCC. We have set a new goal of 2,000 by the end of the year.

July 8, 2020: Senator Manchin, along with Senator Collins, will introduce Hotspots and Online Technology and Services Procurement for our Tribes and States (HOTSPOTS) Act during the next Senate session. The HOTSPOTS Act would create a 2-year, \$160 million hotspot pilot program with a minimum allotment of \$1.6 million per State to allow States, Tribes, and Territories to purchase and distribute internet-connected devices to libraries in low-income and rural areas.

July 8, 2020: Senator Manchin applauds FCC approval of Charleston Area Medical Center's application of \$781,964 for their Telehealth Program.

August 6, 2020: Senator Manchin, along with Senator Cornyn, introduced the bipartisan Accelerating Connected Care and Education Support Services on the Internet (ACCESS the Internet) Act to expand reliable broadband access for education and telehealth appointments for rural American during the COVID-10 pandemic. The ACCESS the Internet Act provides funding for the Education Stabilization Fund, hotspots through libraries, and telehealth services through the FCC and VA.