

Reaching the Last Mile: Hearing on Rural Broadband Examines Solutions to Closing the Digital Divide

July, 17, 2018



Today, the U.S. House of Representatives holds an important hearing to discuss the challenges and benefits of rolling out broadband to rural regions across the country in order to reach communities that are currently affected by the digital divide. We applaud members of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology for opening up a dialogue that brings to the table innovative broadband solutions and approaches to connect more Americans. As we have seen, high-speed and reliable connectivity is the key to improving a community's economic vitality, education, healthcare, and growth, and rural populations have benefitted tremendously from robust broadband networks that help to connect them to the rest of the world.

We are pleased that one of our member companies, Midco, which serves more than 385,000 customers throughout South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Kansas, and Wisconsin is testifying today and talking about their new fixed wireless solution. It's first important to note that nearly all of the communities that Midco serves have populations less than

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50,000 people, but some have as few as 100. It's remarkable that despite serving one of the most difficult areas to deliver internet, Midco has still been able to make high-speed internet—including gigabit connectivity—available to more than 80 percent of its customers. Their investment in and commitment to serving rural America have turned around communities in major ways.

Midco's fixed wireless approach came about with a partnership with Invisimax, a fixed wireless provider, which allows the ISP to bring reliable and affordable internet service to those in its footprint who current don't have access to the network—whether that's due to the type of land that they live in, the miles and miles that separate farms and homes, or the high costs that come with building fiber in these areas. Unlike fiber connectivity, this solution makes it easier for Midco to deploy fixed wireless networks during harsh weather months, to reach remote areas that are as far as 50 miles away from its fiber network, as well as rough terrain and vast areas of farmland—ultimately helping farmers and increasing their productivity, but also allowing multiple people within the same household to run a home business, stream video, and keep up with news and entertainment.

America's ISPs have invested over \$275 billion in the last two decades to connecting all Americans through robust and high-speed broadband networks, and this has resulted in a reach of over 90 percent of U.S. homes that now have connectivity. But there are still regions out there that remain unserved. This hearing today is an important opportunity for those stakeholders representing rural America to make their voices heard in our quest to ensure that every American has the opportunity to take advantage of all that broadband connectivity has to offer.

For more information on how America's ISPs are bringing connectivity to rural populations, visit our page dedicated to rural broadband (<https://www.ncta.com/rural>).



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