

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contacts:** |
| June 15, 2017 | [Megan Taylor](mailto:megan_taylor@heller.senate.gov) 202-224-6244 (Heller)  [Jonathan Kott](mailto:jonathan_kott@manchin.senate.gov) 202-228-1810 (Manchin) |

**Heller, Manchin Introduce Bill to Expand Access to Rural Broadband**

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) today introduced bipartisan legislation that would expand Americans’ access to broadband by streamlining the application process required to construct broadband infrastructure on federal lands.

One of the greatest inhibitors to broadband infrastructure expansion is the time it takes for federal agencies, particularly those that manage federal lands, to act on applications for easements or rights-of-way for constructing or modifying broadband infrastructure on federal property. This legislation seeks to address these delays by expediting the Department of Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) approval process for applications.

Specifically, the legislation implements a 270-day clock for DOI and USFS to respond to applications. If the federal agencies miss the deadline, the application is deemed approved and if the application is denied, the agency must notify the applicant of the reason for denial. It also requires the federal agencies to establish regulations within one year that reflect a streamlined, consistent, and standardized process for application review. Lastly, it requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine the accuracy of and improvements to the National Broadband Map to examine whether this data is accurate and how it is relied upon to award grants for broadband expansion in rural areas.

“Access to high-speed broadband is a pillar of economic growth in the U.S., yet Nevada’s rural communities continue to lag behind because bureaucratic red tape prevents expansion of broadband infrastructure,” **said Heller**. “Given that nearly 85 percent of Nevada is owned by the federal government, many applications to deploy broadband on federal lands remain stalled in a lengthy interagency approval process. From Ely to Pahrump, I continue to hear that this bureaucratic hurdle is stifling innovation and job creation in our rural communities. Our legislation addresses the federal agencies’ inefficient and inconsistent approval process in order to expand broadband access to keep and attract new residents and businesses to Nevada’s rural communities.”

“Streamlining efforts to expand broadband deployment in rural areas like much of West Virginia is a necessary part of closing the digital divide,” **said Manchin.** “Importantly, this legislation includes an assessment of whether the data in the National Broadband Map accurately reflects the broadband coverage currently available to rural consumers and ensures that federal agencies are not unduly delaying the expansion of broadband access in rural America. This legislation is a critical step towards ensuring that the infrastructure necessary for broadband coverage in unserved and underserved communities is more quickly deployed to our rural communities in West Virginia.”

###