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**In Case You Missed It: Heller Leading Bipartisan Fight to Expand Rural Broadband for Nevada’s Communities**



[**Nevada’s Dean Heller introduces bill to expand access to rural broadband**](http://pvtimes.com/news/nevada-s-dean-heller-introduces-bill-expand-access-rural-broadband)

Pahrump Valley Times

Daria Sokolova

U.S. Sens. Dean Heller, R-Nevada, and Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia, introduced bipartisan legislation that aims to expand access to broadband by streamlining the application process required to construct broadband infrastructure on federal lands, the news release said.

The legislation seeks to address the delays by expediting the Department of Interior and the U.S. Forest Service approval process for applications. The legislation implements a 270-day clock for Department of Interior and the U.S. Forest Service to respond to applications, the release said.

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.

It also requires the Government Accountability Office 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,” Heller said in a news release. “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,” Heller said. “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.”

VEA leader welcomes bill

Thomas Husted, CEO of Valley Electric Association, welcomed the bill in a statement saying that it’s “significant” for a state such as Nevada with such a large amount of federal lands.

“For more than a year, Valley Electric has had a request in with BLM to string fiber-optic lines on existing poles in Clark County to serve Sandy Valley, Mountain Springs and other small rural areas. While there has been progress, we still have no idea when we are going to be able to serve the people of Sandy Valley with the high-speed communications they need,” Husted said.

“The approval process is very cumbersome. The people in the rural communities we serve want this service,” Husted added. “The requirement for them to have high-speed communications for their schools, for their medical services for their emergency services is more important than it is in the urban areas.”

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