

DEMOCRATS WORKING FOR.....**BROADBAND**

Fast, effective broadband internet service is not a luxury these days; it's a necessity. Whether for remote schooling or telehealth, for business or news, broadband is essential and without it, we all suffer unnecessarily.

On the national, state and local levels, Democrats are working to bring broadband to Page County and in fact, rural America more generally. But without bipartisan support from the party that controls Page County, rural broadband will remain out of reach.

Joe Biden's program to "Build Back Better" includes an enormous federal investment to bring broadband to rural America-- \$20 billion. The Biden for President website explains,

...when so many jobs and businesses could be located anywhere, high-speed internet access should be a great economic equalizer for rural America, not another economic disadvantage. Investing \$20 billion in rural broadband infrastructure has the potential to create more than a quarter million new jobs. The Biden Plan will triple Community Connect broadband grants and partner with municipal utilities to bring cutting-edge broadband connections to communities across rural America.

Senator Mark Warner has extensive business experience with internet technology and a continuing record of pushing for rural broadband. As his website explains, Sen. Warner has pushed relentlessly for high-speed internet to rural Virginia to help unlock the region's economic potential. In 2014, he helped change the law to make it easier for the government to fund rural broadband projects in Virginia and across the nation. In 2019, he successfully pushed for over \$30 million in grant funding for rural broadband, and rural parts of the Commonwealth are already taking advantage of these new programs.

This funding takes form on the state level. With the support of Democratic Governor Ralph Northam, Virginia maintains a grant program (the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative, at dhcd.virginia.gov/vati) to fund rural broadband. However, here in Page County and elsewhere in the Valley, local governments have failed to obtain that funding. Why?

The Republican officials who dominate the Shenandoah Valley have failed to deliver. Our current Republican Congressman, Ben Cline, seems blind to the problem; he doesn't mention broadband on his website. By contrast, Democratic Congressional candidate Nicholas Betts stresses the need for rural broadband, urging state and local governments to partner with the federal government to expand internet access.

The difference between Cline and Betts is mirrored in the U.S. House of Representatives. Despite Republican opposition, Democrats recently passed a House bill (HR7302) providing \$100 billion to build high-speed broadband in unserved and underserved communities such as Page County. That bill provides low interest financing of broadband, monthly discounts for low income consumers, grant money for

states and students, and wi-fi on school buses. It requires installing fiber or fiber conduit on any highway construction project that is federally funded. It also addresses state laws—as in Virginia—that effectively prevent many municipalities from developing their own broadband systems.

Better internet service should be a bi-partisan effort. Democrats can't do it alone, but we're sure trying. We work to collect survey information from households about their internet speeds, help prepare grant applications, continue to serve on the Page County Broadband Authority and support candidates like Biden-Harris, Warner and Betts who strive for rural broadband. Democratic efforts will succeed with sufficient voter support. If you want broadband in Page County, vote for Democrats.