

Guest opinion: Improving the next National Broadband Map

Rep. Jared Polis and Jessica Rosenworcel Guest Opinion

March 23, 2018

Every map tells a story. In the 1860s, maps were key to establishing Colorado Territory's place in the gold rush. In the 1970s the state's residents decided to map a course from Durango to Denver, which was eventually christened The Colorado Trail. It's justifiably known as mile-for-mile one of the most beautiful pathways in the country.

Today, the most important maps for our Centennial State are different than those that came before. Instead of marking majestic peaks and valleys, they map out the digital future by showing where high-speed internet or broadband is available—and where it is not. Having maps that detail broadband deployment is vital for economic development in Colorado—and beyond. That's because to have a fair shot at 21st century success, every community needs access to high-speed internet.

It's time to update them to reflect what's really going on. According to data from the Federal Communications Commission, there are 24 million Americans without broadband access. That number includes more than 19 million people in rural communities, including 200,000 people in remote areas of Colorado.

While knowing these numbers is helpful, mapping where they are is essential. That's because the old adage is true: you cannot manage what you do not measure. The good news is that, for the first time in years, the FCC has just issued a new National Broadband Map. It depicts the availability of wired broadband service along with visualizations to help compare providers and service areas. This is helpful because a National Broadband Map can illustrate patterns and reveal opportunities. It can tell us where to devote state and federal resources to extend service to some of our hardest-to-reach communities. In addition, when these maps are overlaid with other data—from education to healthcare—we can track correlations that can inform a broader range of issues. In short, an updated National Broadband Map is a blueprint that can help more Colorado communities succeed.

This is good for starters, but the National Broadband Map has real problems. In particular, for the effort to be truly meaningful, we need to ensure that this map incorporates facts on the ground, and that we develop a plan of action around expanding rural broadband. To this end, any responsible map should incorporate the availability of mobile broadband services. It does the country a disservice to have a National Broadband Map with only half the picture. In addition, our new map should rely on more than just data sliced and diced in Washington conference rooms. It should rely on consumers who have stories to relay about their difficulties securing broadband service.

It may sound old-fashioned, but good policy in Washington comes when officials listen to the

people they serve. So it's time to use some crowdsourcing to improve the next National Broadband Map. Now is the time to tell the FCC about your broadband connectivity difficulties: broadbandfail@fcc.gov (<mailto:broadbandfail@fcc.gov>). You can weigh-in and be a part of telling the Colorado story by literally mapping out our future path.

Jared Polis serves the state of Colorado in the U.S. House of Representatives. Jessica Rosenworcel is a lawyer and commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission.