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Welcome to the Roaring '20s

BROADBAND COMMUNITIES authors look forward to the fiber future.

Finishing one decade is always a good opportunity to look ahead to the next. In this issue of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES**, Jon Sallet of the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society sets ambitious goals for broadband in the United States in the 2020s (p. 46), and associate editor Sean Buckley (p. 38) and longtime contributor Bryan Rader (p. 22) peer beyond the horizon to discover where broadband is headed.

Sallet, who presented his vision in a keynote address at BBC's October 2019 conference, calls for deploying universal high-performance broadband, encouraging competition, promoting broadband adoption, and ensuring that community anchor institutions have access to competitively priced, high-performance broadband. He offers detailed policy recommendations to help move the country toward what he calls "a profoundly democratic vision."

Sallet's most controversial recommendations involve restricting subsidies to "future-proof, scalable networks" and allowing subsidies for overbuilds if they will result in high-performance, affordable broadband service. Such measures are politically difficult; however, it's hard to see how else the United States can achieve the goals he outlines in the next decade.

FTTH FORGES AHEAD

Meanwhile, according to RVA LLC, 2019 proved to be a banner year for fiber to the home, and 2020 promises to be nearly as good. Broadband providers have now passed 46.5 million unique U.S. homes with fiber, up more than 6 million since the year before –

not bad for a technology that got started just 20 years ago. In addition, nearly 3 million households can choose between two or more fiber connections. Not bad for what was once considered a "natural monopoly."

Fiber is justifying its reputation for being future-proof infrastructure as providers move to upgrade their electronics to newer technologies. As take rates rise and next-generation equipment is deployed, the same fiber that delivers broadband service to 20.5 million households today will soon supply a much larger number of households at faster speeds – not to mention millions of 5G wireless subscribers.

Another trend worth noting is that fiber is drawing new interest from investors. In earlier years, Wall Street viewed fiber as an unnecessary luxury. Today, infrastructure funds, private equity sponsors and strategic buyers are all looking to increase their holdings of fiber assets.

Finally, in the world of multifamily broadband, Rader foresees a future in which streaming services proliferate confusingly while linear TV packages continue to be pared down. Bulk internet – a relatively new development lauded for its price savings and criticized for its failure to allow residents a choice – will grow in popularity, as will amenity Wi-Fi, and smart-home services will remain in limbo.

Whatever you foresee for 2020, I hope it's a good year for you! ❖

Masha Zager

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