



**FROM THE DESK OF  
COMMISSIONER  
BRENT BAILEY  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OFFICE**



*The Central District is pleased to bring you the latest information concerning utility rates, project developments, Public Service Commission actions and other news you can use. I hope you will find this information to be a useful resource to learn about the Public Service Commission, consumer issues and the continuous work we are doing for the citizens in the Central District and across the state of Mississippi. Thank you again for allowing me to serve you in this capacity.*

*Brent Bailey*



## **RURAL BROADBAND/INTERNET ISSUES**

### **FCC Approves \$20.4 Billion Rural Broadband Fund**

On January 30, 2020, the Federal Communications Commission announced the adoption of its new **Rural Digital Opportunity Fund** (RDOF) for faster broadband speeds in order to help close the digital divide in rural areas. The RDOF will push out up to \$20.4 billion in funding over the next 10 years to build and connect broadband speeds of at least 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up in underserved rural areas. The RDOF will be implemented through a two-phase reverse auction process, which includes the incumbent major telecomms competing directly with independent broadband providers. The FCC has identified about six million rural homes and businesses that are currently located in areas initially eligible for bidding in the \$16 billion Phase I auction.

This RDOF investment follows on the heels of a **\$9 billion fund for rural 5G** connectivity that the FCC announced last month. Telecommunications companies have previously secured billions of dollars in subsidies to deploy broadband service

with at least 10 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream to specific rural locations through the **Connect America Fund (CAF) II** program. Under the RDOF, prospective bidders must commit to providing a minimum speed more than double than was required under the CAF II program.

The MPSC will continue to monitor the progress of the RDOF and roll out of the rules guiding the reverse auction format and the maps that the FCC will use to determine area eligibility.

### **Federal Omnibus Appropriations Bill Contains Broadband Support Funding**

Legislation to fund the federal government adopted by Congress in 2019 contained funding for increased broadband access for rural communities. Specifically, the appropriations bill provides \$550 million in grant funding for the **USDA ReConnect Program** which will help expand broadband access to historically underserved communities. The application window for this round of funding opened on Jan. 31, 2020 and will close on March 16, 2020.



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## C Spire, Entergy Complete Last Segment of Broadband Infrastructure Project

Construction crews in December drilled 40 feet below the bottom of the Ross Barnett Reservoir to place conduit and connect a 6,585 linear foot section of the last remaining span between Highway 43 on the south end of the reservoir and Pipeline Road on the north end of the lake. The feat completes the [18-month construction project](#) that spans over 300 miles and 15 counties in some of the most rural, isolated areas of the state. More than 4,000 homes and over 1,000 businesses are within 500 feet of the fiber optic lines along the five separate routes. The project should help accelerate efforts to use broadband infrastructure to advance the state's economy, education, agriculture, healthcare and meet the growing 21st century voice and data communications needs of consumers and businesses. The MPSC will continue to monitor progress of this project, the number of new customers served and the cost effectiveness and quality of service.

### [What to Consider in Broadband Planning for Rural Communities](#)

*Communities that want broadband should produce a plan that's as comprehensive as possible. Here's what local leaders should consider as they plan to expand broadband: Know the types of broadband technology; Create a list of current community assets and plan for implementation; Develop a financing plan with multiple options.*

*Go to this [link for the full article](#).*

## FCC Precision Ag Task Force Begins Work

The [first meeting](#) of the Federal Communications Commission's [Task Force for Reviewing Connectivity and Technology Needs of Precision Agriculture](#) was held in December. Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation President Mike McCormick serves on the task force. The FCC was directed to establish the task force in the Precision Agriculture Connectivity Act of 2018, which was passed into law as part of the 2018 farm bill. The task force members will consider the focus of its various working groups, review the 2018 farm bill and existing FCC and USDA programs and policies relevant to the task force's duties, and discuss strategies to advance broadband deployment on agricultural land and promote precision agriculture. The MPSC looks forward to working with Mr. McCormick to bring resources to Mississippi that will rapidly expand broadband services.

## U.S. House Passes Broadband Mapping Legislation

The United States House of Representatives recently passed the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability (DATA) Act, [H.R. 4229](#). This bill would improve the accuracy of broadband coverage maps and better direct federal funds for broadband build out. H.R. 4229 is similar to S. 1822, the Broadband DATA Act. S. 1822 was passed out of the Senate and is awaiting action in the House of Representatives.