

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen in Stafford County, Virginia



May 13, 2024

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you for joining me here today.

President Biden's American Rescue Plan was enacted in March 2021, in the depths of the COVID pandemic. It provided much-needed support to states, cities, and counties. They used that support to address their citizens' urgent needs: from expanding public health services to keeping people housed and businesses open. The American Rescue Plan's support drove a historic recovery. But beyond that, along with the trifecta of legislation we've passed since—the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act—the ARP is fueling investments that will boost our economy's prospects over the medium- and long-term.

Today, Americans are seeing the economy expanding, a healthy labor market, and inflation that has come down significantly from its peak. That said, the President and I know that when you walk into a grocery store, or go to the doctor, or pay your rent, the costs are still too high. Addressing them is the President's top economic priority, and we've taken action to lower key household expenses like energy and health care. As we look ahead, I believe that inflation will continue to come down while we maintain a strong economy.

Put simply, despite the challenges we've faced, we've emerged stronger and poised for future growth. I'm glad to have the opportunity to visit a project that exemplifies this. Investing in high-speed internet is an Administration-wide priority, with a goal of connecting every American by 2030. It's a key example of our agenda to expand our economy's capacity to produce in order to drive growth while increasing opportunity for people and places that haven't had enough of it. We're also saving Americans money right away.

I. INVESTMENTS IN BROADBAND

So, let me talk about what we've done. The American Rescue Plan's Capital Projects Fund allocated \$10 billion to states, territories, and Tribal governments for internet and other critical

capital projects. Virginia has chosen to spend its entire allocation on expanding high-speed internet infrastructure to reach the nearly 20 percent of locations that currently lack such access across the state.

In addition to that, localities have committed \$8 billion from the ARP's State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program to expansion of internet access. Here in Virginia, nearly \$600 million has been allocated for this purpose.

And the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program, BEAD, provides \$42.5 billion. This is the largest investment for internet in our history. It will mean an additional nearly \$1.5 billion for high-speed internet here in Virginia.

Alongside federal funds, states, cities, and counties are stepping up as well. And the private sector, including Comcast, as we see right here, is seizing the opportunity to expand services. That's why I see our efforts to close the digital divide as a prime example of how all levels of government, along with private companies and non-profits, can effectively work together. Spurring such partnerships has been at the heart of President Biden's economic agenda to Invest in America.

II. DRIVING GROWTH

We're seeing the impacts. Investing in internet access creates jobs. Making high-speed internet a reality requires manufacturing fiber-optic cable and installing it across the country. This means new employment opportunities for thousands of Americans, including many well-paying union jobs.

But like with roads, bridges, and rail, the jobs created from building infrastructure are just one reason infrastructure matters. It's also crucial to boosting productivity and growth.

We saw this most starkly in the pandemic, which revealed that investing in broadband was an urgent need. The pandemic forced education online, meaning kids across the country needed internet access to learn. Workplaces shuttered their office doors, meaning countless employees needed internet access to do their jobs. Doctor's offices closed too, leaving many seniors and veterans dependent on internet access to get health care through telemedicine.

And while broadband may have been particularly critical during the pandemic when other options weren't available, there's very little you can do in a modern economy without a reliable, affordable internet connection. It's not just key to completing homework and receiving health

care. It's key to individuals looking and applying for jobs. It's key to businesses reaching new customers.

In brief, high-speed internet isn't a luxury. It stopped being that a long time ago. Now, high-speed internet is an economic necessity. It's crucial to participating in and benefitting from the economy—whether you're 10 years old, or 30, or 60; no matter where you work and live.

III. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

And investing in broadband is at the heart of President Biden's economic agenda because it matters not just for growth but also for expanding opportunity.

High-speed internet access in this country hasn't been evenly distributed. In rural areas, around one third of households don't have reliable high-speed access. That's unacceptable. But it's also an opportunity. It means that investing in high-speed internet can increase economic opportunity in places where potential exists but opportunity often hasn't. These investments can be more impactful, yielding bigger economic gains.

Virginia is working to make good on the promise of expanding opportunity. This project has reached over 600 addresses: homes and businesses that had previously lacked high-speed internet.

And it's not only reach that matters. As President Biden said and I want to emphasize today, "It's not enough to just have Internet access. It needs to be affordable." This has long been a challenge, in rural and urban areas.

We've designed our investments to address this, pulling all the policy levers we have to reduce costs. Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Affordable Connectivity Program, or ACP, we've secured commitments from leading internet service providers, including Comcast, to offer high-speed, high-quality plans for no more than \$30 per month. 23 million American households have taken advantage of the Program, including over 470,000 families in Virginia. That means significant savings, freeing up funds for families to put toward other needs.

ACP is now at risk because funding is running out this month. We know families are struggling with the high costs of key household expenses. We know how crucial the internet is. So I urge Congress to act to continue support for the Program.

I also want to address another urgent issue. The Senate may vote this week on a resolution that would overturn Treasury's guidance on obligating State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. The

guidance gave state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments the clarity and flexibility they needed to work toward completing projects, from expanding internet access to building affordable housing. If the guidance is overturned, critical projects—such as nearly 8,000 infrastructure projects across the country, including over 100 here in Virginia—may not have the funding they need. It's crucial that localities can move these projects forward to improve the lives of Americans across the country.

IV. CONCLUSION

Let me end by reemphasizing that what we're seeing here, with this project, and throughout Virginia, is happening across the country. It's changing the lives of individuals and families. And it's an example of the Biden Administration's broader agenda: to build on our historic recovery and drive inclusive growth for every American. Thank you for being here today and for supporting this work.

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