

**THE REPUBLICAN  
BRINGING WMASS INTO 21ST CENTURY**

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Remember dial-up Internet access?

It wasn't really that many years ago, but looking back from our broadband world, with streaming video and Web pages that load in a flash, those old days of the pinging modems and computers that always seemed stuck feel an awful lot like the dark ages.

We are fortunate to have left those days behind.

Unless, that is, you happen to live in a rural community where high-speed Internet access is still some kind of futuristic dream.

There are currently 32 communities in the Bay State with no high-speed Internet access. All but one of those towns is in Western Massachusetts. (Across the whole state, there are an additional 63 communities with just partial broadband service.)

There are many people in Boston and its environs who tend to think of Western Massachusetts as a throwback to another time. Those of us out here in the four western counties, they think, are living in the woods - literally and metaphorically. That's a silly characterization, of course, except when it comes to broadband Internet access.

Thankfully, Gov. Deval L. Patrick is pushing a law that would invest \$25 million to bring broadband to those communities that don't have it. It's a wise plan, and lawmakers would do well to get on board.

Imagine someone trying to run a business with only a dial-up modem as his connection to the outside world. It would be virtually impossible in today's environment. Or a student trying to do some research. Do you think I have, like, forever?

Massachusetts is not a big state, but we in the western counties may as well be a thousand miles from Boston when it comes to broadband.

Patrick's plan, which would assist rather than supplant private investment, is the right measure to try to close that distance.

We like to think of ourselves here in the commonwealth as being on the cutting edge of so much, but too many of us are left out in the cold without high-speed Internet access. It's 2008 in all of Massachusetts, not just out east.

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