

## Billions to Connect Everyone to High-Speed Internet Could Still Fall Short

President Biden has promised to provide every American access to reliable high-speed internet. But some have raised concerns about whether the funds will achieve all of the administration's goals.

By Madeleine Ngo

Madeleine Ngo traveled to Fort Towson, Okla., and Townsend, Mont., to interview residents who lacked fast internet service.

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“Other states with low population densities, such as Montana, could also face more challenges. In Broadwater County, Mont., where many homes are separated by vast stretches of grassy land and some are tucked in mountainous areas, residents said the lack of fast service made it difficult to do things like work from home.

Denise Thompson, 58, who operates a cattle ranch with her husband in Townsend, Mont., said she wanted to start a website to ship more beef products, but she was unsure how she could operate it at home because she relied on her phone's hot spot for internet access and her connection was slow. She has not tried streaming a movie in about a year because it is usually stuck buffering for minutes.

Her house sits in a gulch in between two tall hills and her nearest neighbor is about three miles away, so her only other option is satellite service. Even with the new federal money, Ms. Thompson said she was skeptical she would see more reliable options.

“I really don't expect that to happen,” she said.

Lindsey Richtmyer, a county commissioner, said many locations would be categorized as underserved but actually received slower service than reflected by the F.C.C.'s map. County officials are encouraging residents to take state speed tests in hopes of identifying much of the area as unserved.

Estimates have found that Montana would need more than \$1.2 billion to deploy fiber to all unserved and underserved locations, a shortfall of more than \$500 million. Misty Ann Giles, the director of Montana's Department of Administration, said a mix of technologies would be required to reach everyone, because deploying fiber could cost the state up to \$300,000 in some locations.

“Obviously more money would have been appreciated,” she said. “But we're going to figure it out and make it work.”