



This is a Rural Broadband Editorial published in the *Raleigh News & Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer* on April 13, 2021. It is written by NCEDA member **Elizabeth Underwood** (Beaufort County Economic Development).

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## **RURAL BROADBAND**

*The writer is an economic development specialist in Beaufort County.*

I grew up in suburban Charlotte where the solution to internet trouble typically required a simple restart of the router or switching to one of many other providers. I never realized there were people in my home state unable to access the digital world because they [lack broadband](#) infrastructure.

According to the N.C. Department of Information Technology and the Pew Research Center (2015) seven out of 10 teachers nationwide give homework assignments that require the internet. Yet, an estimated 5 million households with school-age children lack access to the internet, often due to the absence of rural broadband infrastructure.

Lack of rural broadband is contributing to younger generations leaving rural N.C. for better opportunities. Out-migration impacts our workforce, often eliminating rural N.C. areas from consideration by companies seeking expansion and relocation destinations.

That's why the [N.C. Economic Development Association](#) is advocating aggressively for broadband solutions that ensure businesses, residents and students across the state have access to the ever-increasing global economy.

Just as digital educational resources help prepare students for sustainable careers, telehealth applications have the potential to improve healthcare access for rural patients and save lives.

I suffered a COVID-19 infection in February. Thanks to telemedicine and broadband access, I was able to access my doctor virtually three times for my asthma-stricken lungs without exposing an emergency room or doctor's office. Rural America needs this option.

The American Rescue Plan is extending massive federal resources to states and communities for broadband, with additional appropriations likely when Congress passes an infrastructure bill.

Lack of broadband is a solvable problem. The time is now. NCEDA and other organizations are urging governing entities to create a bold, specific plan with American Rescue Plan allocations designated for connectivity.

Achievable solutions are critical for students and schools, for telehealth, business creation, economic growth and sustainable prosperity.

Elizabeth Underwood, Greenville