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Udall, Gardner Introduce Bill to Put Wi-Fi on School Buses

Bipartisan bill aims to close "homework gap" that disadvantages low-income and rural students without internet access at home

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and U.S. Senator Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) introduced a bill to put wireless internet on school buses in order to help students without broadband access at home get online to study and do homework. The legislation would allow the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) E-Rate program to reimburse schools that place wi-fi technology on school buses carrying students to school or school related extracurricular activities.

"Every New Mexico kid should have every opportunity to succeed – no matter where they live. But nearly one-third of kids in New Mexico are at risk of falling behind simply because they can't get on the internet at home," Udall said. "It's time to end the homework gap. Our legislation will help give all students the ability to get online to study and do homework assignments while they're on the bus – a common sense, 21st century solution. By boosting federal investment in broadband and internet infrastructure, we'll help close the digital divide that hurts too many rural New Mexico communities, Tribes, and low-income families."

“Many students in rural school districts across Colorado and the country spend hours on the bus each day commuting to and from school and traveling to sporting events,” said Gardner. “These students should have the opportunity to use their time more effectively and installing Wi-Fi on school buses will allow them to finish homework assignments and bring the classroom to the road. Senator Udall and I are introducing this bipartisan legislation that will allow school districts to invest in their students and use federal dollars to outfit their school buses with WiFi. This will help rural students and especially low-income students who may not otherwise have access to mobile Internet. I’m excited about this new opportunity and look forward to seeing students in Colorado benefit from this initiative.”

"I applaud Senator Udall and Senator Gardner for their forward thinking to increase access and opportunity in order to bridge the divide that exists for many children in this country," added Dr. Veronica C. Garcia, superintendent of Santa Fe Public School.

Udall and Gardner’s legislation was inspired by Jonah Madrid, a New Mexico student athlete. During a [roundtable on the homework gap](#) at Hatch Valley High School, Madrid told Udall and FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel about the great lengths he would go to find wi-fi signal after school was over. Madrid shared that, after traveling hours on the bus to football games, he would sit in the school parking lot late at night to do his homework because that was the only place he could access a wireless internet signal. Madrid proposed putting wireless technology on his school bus in order to let him and his teammates make use of their long bus rides.

Earlier this month, Udall joined Santa Fe Public Schools and Google to roll out their Rolling Study Halls initiative, which has equipped six Santa Fe area school buses with wi-fi technology to help students with long commutes access the internet.

The legislation has received widespread support from stakeholders, including the School Superintendents Association, a professional organization representing thousands of educational leaders through America and the world, the Competitive Carriers Association, an advocacy organization for rural, regional and nationwide wireless telecommunications, and NTUA Wireless, a Navajo owned communications company. Tribal communities in New Mexico are particularly disadvantaged by the digital divide, with nearly 80 percent of Tribal members living in rural New Mexico unable to access the internet at home.

"When we think about efficiencies in federal policies, and common sense solutions that allow education system leaders to make small changes with big impacts: that is the type of policy we can support," said Daniel A. Domenech, Executive Director of the School Superintendents Association. "AASA applauds Mr. Gardner and Mr. Udall for their continued leadership on the issue of expanding access to internet for our students, and AASA is pleased to support their bill that would require the Federal Communications Commission to include Wi-Fi access on school buses an eligible use of the E-Rate program. AASA has long supported the E-Rate program, responsible for transforming internet access in classrooms across the nation over the last two decades, and this legislation is another step forward in ensuring that today's 24-hour students have 24-hour access."

"Making Wi-Fi services available for students on school buses eligible for E-rate support is a win-win for everyone, and I thank Senators Udall and Gardner for introducing this legislation," said Steven K. Berry, President and CEO of the Competitive Carriers Association. "Access to educational resources is just one of the many benefits that robust mobile broadband services provides, and this bill will be especially beneficial for students in rural areas with long drive-times to and from school. 'Connected buses' should be available to all students, no matter where they live, and CCA supports this legislation moving forward."

"I am pleased to support the expanded use of E-Rate funds to include wireless internet service on school buses," said Clyde Casciato, NTUA Wireless General Manager. "Living and working on the Navajo nation, I know firsthand the challenges facing our educators and students due to lack of internet access. For many people, internet access is not available at home or in their community, making it nearly impossible for students to complete homework assignments and research projects. In the past year, NTUAW has partnered with Kayenta Unified School District to trial this service on three different school bus routes. Not only has the technology worked successfully, it has been used regularly by students to complete assignments. By deploying wireless internet access on school buses, students are able to take advantage of what would otherwise be lost hours on the school bus each day to continue their education. Unfortunately, without E-Rate funds to support this initiative, it will never become a reality for most schools as they cannot afford to take on the expense of this additional service. Without a doubt, expanding E-Rate funds to include internet access on school buses will impact the quality of education received by so many students on the Navajo Nation. On behalf of NTUAW, I want to thank you for advocating to fund this service, and look

forward to the opportunity to partner with schools to get it deployed on school buses throughout the Navajo Nation.”

A copy of the legislation is available [HERE](#).