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Connectivity, digital platforms critical for upstate revival



Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Improved internet connectivity will be crucial to reimagining communities across New York state.

The past year has proven what we already knew — access to reliable internet connectivity and digital resources are as important as water and electrical infrastructure. Online platforms have allowed children to remain in class, parents to stay employed, family-owned businesses to continue operations, and people who need health care to access care through telehealth services.

So as lawmakers chart the path toward recovery, they must prioritize

broadband expansion, ensuring access for all, and recognize the value of internet-enabled tools and services. This will take a commitment by lawmakers to provide the funding needed.

Upstate business and local leaders are focused on growing our population, promoting economic development, and facilitating the creation of high-paying jobs. And we have long recognized that access to technology is foundational for achieving these goals.

In working with municipalities in upstate New York, I have seen firsthand how broadband expansion can uplift our communities, especially during the pandemic, which has highlighted the digital access divide. Federal officials recognize this sentiment, too, with broadband funding and an FCC directive to better map access voids as key considerations in Washington.

However, internet access is just the

start. The digital services that empower small business growth, allow local governments to serve their constituents, and keep families connected remain critical to our ongoing work to build back struggling communities.

As non-essential businesses shuttered their doors and the professional community adjusted to remote work, small-business owners were thankfully able to leverage digital platforms to remain engaged with customers and employees with the support of not just the internet, but with internet-enabled tools.

I recently had the opportunity to testify before the state Legislature on the very issue of access to technology. As such, I expect lawmakers to avoid restrictive policies that discourage investment and deployment of communications infrastructure. And I hope our political leaders take this understanding

one step further, and recognize that digital tools and platforms will be vital to supporting the recovery and resilience of upstate communities as they attract innovative professionals finding themselves untethered to city living as remote working opportunities proliferate.

New York's leadership should welcome the role that technology services — and the companies who build and provide them — play in economic development across the state. A measured approach to tech policymaking is needed, one that recognizes the fact that digital services are as critical as water and electric, and will serve as a great equalizer across the cities, villages and towns that span upstate New York.

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