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## **GUEST OPINION**

# *A chance to bring more broadband access to northeast Washington*

**S**EATTLE IS HOME TO MANY things that people in our part of the state are happy to go without. Heavy traffic, crime, excessive taxes and a lot of rules and restrictions, to name a few.

But there is one thing that most people in Seattle and the Puget Sound region take for granted that many in northeast Washington want and need — better access to broadband.



**Sen. Shelly Short**

Broadband is as important now as the telephone was in the previous century. It's a 21st-century

must that allows people to use the internet and digital tools and gadgets for both work, education and play. Unfortunately, it has yet to reach some communities and homes in our rural district, causing them to miss out on so much that today's technology offers. We know that bringing broadband to more rural, isolated parts of Washington removes barriers to entrepreneurial opportunities and economic development.

There was a point when people began seeing a telephone as a necessity rather than a luxury, and we should look at broadband the same way. Besides the benefits it would offer employers and families, broadband access is also important for health care and public safety, especially during an emergency. Fire crews need broadband to effectively communicate and coordinate with each other when they try to stop a fast-moving wildfire.

Broadband is a necessity for 21st-century students. Nowadays, many students go paperless in schools. They use digital textbooks in several classes instead of the hardbound books that previous generations used when they were in school. But we have many students who don't have broadband access when it's homework

time. Being unable to use digital textbooks at home puts those students at a disadvantage.

Gov. Inslee requested a bill (Senate Bill 5511) this session that focuses on public-private partnerships to bring more broadband access to Washington. I'm one of its co-sponsors. I acknowledge that I'm not crazy about some parts of his proposal, but overall, this establishes an important foundation and tool to give communities across the state the broadband access that they need.

For example, our public utility districts across the state could become providers of last resort, albeit in a limited way, so as to not unfairly compete with private providers in order to help bring broadband service to unserved areas of the state. The internet infrastructure itself would be funded by appropriations in partnership with private service providers.

And last Wednesday, the Legislature passed SB 5511! Both the Senate and House approved it with strong majorities, and it now goes to the governor's desk for his signature. I know I couldn't have done this without many of you who came across the state to testify on why this bill would help you and your families. Representatives from the Colville Confederated Tribes and the Washington Library Association were just some of the people who spoke about the necessity of this service.

This is an issue that has had plenty of momentum this session, and that momentum has paid off in laying a foundation of public-private partnerships to begin to provide unserved and underserved communities with reliable broadband service.

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SEN. SHELLEY SHORT, R-Addy, serves the 7th Legislative District, which includes Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties and parts of Okanogan and Spokane counties.