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## Boozman Bulletin: Connecting Arkansas

Dr. Juston Evenson moved his family from Missouri to Arkansas in 2013, and he and his wife settled into a house on a quiet cul-de-sac in Van Buren. The Evensons were intent on homeschooling their young children, but they ran into a hurdle: lack of access to quality internet service. While they have the option of using satellite internet service, it's insufficient for online coursework, forcing the family to reevaluate the decision to homeschool.

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 84 percent of rural Arkansas lacks access to standard broadband services, which is more than 30 percent higher than the national average.

Internet access plays an increasingly important role in all sectors of our economy, from education to agriculture and telemedicine to economic innovation. Broadband is an important economic tool and we must provide all Arkansans with this 21<sup>st</sup> century building block, because connectivity is the infrastructure for the modern age. Linking Arkansans to the internet is a critical economic driver.

That's why I'm helping lead efforts to strengthen broadband in Arkansas and across the country with the [launch of the Senate Broadband Caucus](#).



*I delivered remarks at the launch of the Senate Broadband Caucus.*

I'm proud to work with my colleagues in the Senate and industry leaders to develop policy solutions that focus on closing the digital divide that exists in rural Arkansas and in communities across the country by strengthening infrastructure and deployment.

The economic benefits of broadband infrastructure are clear. For every \$5 billion invested in broadband infrastructure, 250,000 jobs are created and with every percentage point increase in new broadband distribution, employment expands by 300,000 jobs. Yet, high speed internet is a luxury for most Arkansans.

Last week I pressed the FCC Chairman to [prioritize new mobile broadband deployment in rural areas](#) as well as preserve and upgrade mobile broadband where it's currently available.

Arkansans rely on access to this building block. The internet is an essential resource that is transforming how we communicate, do business, learn and administer health care. Families like the Evensons depend on it for educating their children. We must help make this a reality.

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#### Quick Takes:

- **Ending safe-havens for dangerous criminals in the country illegally:** Sanctuary policies of more than 300 communities across the country threaten the safety of our citizens and undermine enforcement of our immigration laws. We must hold these communities accountable for their failure to uphold the law because of the risk these dangerous policies pose to public safety. [I voted to end the sanctuary city policies in two votes on the Senate floor earlier this month.](#) Senate Democrats blocked the bills from reaching the sixty-vote threshold necessary to continue debate.
- **Preventing an increase to grocery bills:** Arkansas families shouldn't face an increase in grocery bills as a result of a law that was crafted by the state of Vermont. I supported legislation that Congress passed earlier this month that [provides consumers with more information about the foods they buy and ends the confusing and costly patchwork](#) of state biotechnology labeling mandates.

- **Combating the opioid epidemic:** Heroin and prescription painkiller abuse is destroying families and communities across the country. I was proud to support the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act* to help combat this epidemic. [Congress passed this legislation to strengthen prevention, treatment and recovery efforts to help those struggling with drug dependency.](#)
- **Fighting for accountability at VA:** Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert McDonald set a dangerous precedent by ignoring the law passed by Congress to hold VA employees accountable. This is why it's even more imperative that the Senate pass the *Veterans First Act*. We need to enforce measures that will prevent the small number of employees who abuse their positions from undermining the great work being done by the vast majority of VA employees around the country. I joined members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on the Senate floor recently to [push for this bill to get a vote.](#)
- **Protecting military families:** The Senate-passed Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) cuts earned military compensation that will impact military families. This is why I'm urging my colleagues who are resolving differences between the Senate and House versions of the NDAA [to protect military housing allowances and prevent drastic pay cuts to our service members.](#)
- **Ramping up airport security:** Congress passed a [significant airport security reform bill](#) last week that will protect our country from the threat posed by ISIS and other terrorist groups. Provisions in the *FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016* will help protect air travelers from the time they enter an airport on through to their final destination. The legislation also includes a [provision I authored to allow pilots to fly many types of small, light aircraft without a third class medical certificate.](#)
- **Recognizing 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fulbright Program:** Former Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright created a program to connect the world through education. In seven decades, it's clear his vision has become an important diplomatic tool to increase mutual understanding between our country and others. The Fulbright Program aims to foster a better understanding of different cultures and ideals while promoting peace and higher education. I'm proud the [Senate recognized the 70th anniversary of Senator Fulbright's legacy.](#)
- **Congratulating the American Tree Farm System:** The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) was founded to help woodland owners sustain forests and promote the benefits provided by forests. More than 1.2 million acres in Arkansas are part of the ATFS. The organization is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Last week the Senate passed a [resolution I introduced recognizing this milestone.](#)
- **Listening to Arkansans:** Arkansans from across the state [joined me in a recent telephone town hall](#) to ask me questions about the issues being debated in Washington and share concerns about about the topics impacting our state and their families. This is a convenient way for me to connect with citizens while voting in Washington. I'll be hosting another telephone town hall soon. [You can sign up to participate here.](#)
- **Highlighting Arkansas veterans:** The latest edition of the 'Salute to Veterans' series that highlights the service and sacrifice of Arkansas veterans who served our nation

in uniform recognized WWII veteran Billie Seamans. He served in the Army Air Force as photographer on the “Flying Fortress,” the B-17. [Listen to his memories of his service.](#) I recently [submitted his interview to the Veterans History Project](#), an initiative of the Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center to collect and retain the oral histories of our nation’s veterans.

- **Connecting on social media:** Stay up to date with what I’m doing for Arkansans via social media. You can find me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).



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