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Local MP Kyle Seeback says there?s ?nothing new? in Feds? $1.75 billion rural internet fund

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

While Canadians spend more time at home and online with work, classes and shopping due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian government has announced their goal of connecting 98 percent of Canadians to high speed internet by 2026.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau held a conference in Ottawa on Monday (Nov.9) to launch the $1.75 billion universal broadband fund to connect Canadians to high speed internet. The fund was originally announced as a $1 billion program in the federal government's 2019 budget, but has now had an additional $750,000 added.

?Good reliable internet isn't a luxury, it's a basic service and it's a service that every single Canadian deserves,? said Trudeau in the press conference.

The government's goal is to provide 98 percent of Canadians with the ability to access a high-speed internet service by 2026 ? up from the previous goal of 95 percent ? and the rest by 2030. Trudeau said that the funding will be used almost entirely in rural and remote communities.

?These are ambitious targets and we're ready to meet them,? said Trudeau.

As part of the funding, $150 million is included for Rapid Response Stream, an accelerated application process, for ?shovel-ready projects? and communities aiming to be connected by next year.

?We'll be looking at those projects that serve the most people and connect quickly,? King-Vaughan MP Deb Schulte told the Citizen. ?It's really a matter of what are the best projects and for the rapid stream, how fast can they be done.?

Much of the funding in the universal broadband will be used in rural areas, such as Dufferin County and Caledon, where high-speed internet has been a long standing issue.

?The people in Dufferin and Caledon have the same challenges as those in King, in that they're more dispersed and we've got topography that makes it difficult sometimes with cellular,? said Schulte. ?They really need this as a solution to be able to help. The internet providers are saying ?there's only five or six of you down that road, it's really not worth bring in the line' and this is where the government can partner with municipalities , and with provinces.?

While Liberal MP Schulte speaks to the benefits of the funding, Conservative Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback said he is skeptical about the deliverability of the promise.

?This is effectively the same announcement that they made with budget 2019, which is a year and a half ago, and it's virtually the same announcement they made in June of 2020,? said Seeback.

Seeback also said he has concerned about the affordability of high-speed internet for rural areas.

?People in Dufferin-Caledon, I've seen the bills, $400, $500, $600, $700, a month and none of this addresses that,? said Seeback. ?The deliverability on this is a huge issue and there's nothing that talks about affordability.?

The government also has a $600 million agreement with Telesat for satellite capacity to improve connectivity and expand

high-speed internet in remote and rural areas.