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America's top telecom companies are eager to end support for their aging copper networks in favor of next-gen fiber optic cables that are much more profitable and come with fewer regulatory strings attached. But the nation's top telecom regulator has a message for them: Not so fast. "It's easy to say that old-fashioned, all-copper networks are obsolete," said Federal Communications Chairman Tom Wheeler at a telecommunications conference Monday. But, he added, recent advances in copper-based broadband technology mean it's too soon to kill off copper for good. "Our goal should be to improve our copper retirement process to strengthen our core values, including competition," he said.



There are a number of other reasons why telecom companies are interested in fiber. Consumer demand for fiber has been increasing at copper's expense. And because there are fewer existing regulations applying to fiber, the companies also see an opportunity to expand without the usual level of FCC oversight. But federal officials

still require providers to invest in copper despite the declining usage, in part because copper is still what supports networks in many low-income and rural areas. Firms, such as AT&T, have begun trial-testing a switch to fiber in those regions to determine if the process will produce disruptions in service to seniors and rural Americans. AT&T's tests involve one experiment in a senior citizens center and one rural experiment. The tests are motivated by officials' concerns that call quality, 911 emergency response and access to phone services in general could suffer if the switch takes place too hastily.

On Monday, Wheeler said he would introduce measures to make sure the nation's copper infrastructure is phased out responsibly — part of a series of principles aimed at keeping incumbent phone companies from trampling over smaller, competitive carriers in the dash toward greener fiber pastures. One question the FCC will ask is whether incumbent carriers should sell their copper to the competitive carriers rather than simply leaving the technology by the wayside. The agency will also explore what maintenance requirements, if any, should be imposed on copper cabling that does not get retired.

These and other moves, according to Wheeler, will limit the opportunity for incumbents to gain too much of an advantage over smaller companies. Wheeler repeated his now familiar slogan: "competition, competition, competition." Industry officials have said the slogan has been met with few specifics from Wheeler — but the new efforts may be a sign of change, according to Gene Kimmelman, chief executive of the consumer group Public Knowledge. "This is much more specific than anything I've heard on this," said Kimmelman. "It's meat on the bones." — *Washington Post*

Laying down high-speed fiber is expensive. Digging trenches in the ground and stringing cables along utility poles is expensive. Getting permission to do all that is expensive. But it turns out that all of that is a fraction of the cost of offering TV programming, according to the head of Google Fiber, Milo Medin. And it's a cost Google can't avoid paying.

Video "is the single biggest impediment" to Google Fiber's deployment, Medin told an audience at the COMPTEL telecom conference in Dallas on Monday. "It is the single biggest piece of our cost structure." Why is Google so down on TV? Because as important as Internet access is, Americans still love their triple-play bundle. You can't sell Internet these days without also offering a TV package. "If you're going to pull customers to your broadband and other services, you've got to lead with video," said Jeff Gardner, the chief executive of Windstream.

But in video, Google has a distinct disadvantage. Not only does it lack its own programming, in contrast to big incumbents such as Comcast that own large content production operations, but Google is also paying a lot more for programming than some other players. "We operate at a very significant difference than incumbents we compete against," said Medin. "We may be paying in some markets double what incumbents are paying for the same programming."

Google Fiber has encouraged other carriers to increase speeds, add services or cut prices in a number of markets — particularly in Austin, Tex., which Medin said will see its first Fiber customers get online by the end of the year. But until Google can begin to strike better deals for content, there will likely be a limit to how much it can force other companies to change. — **Washington Post**

National Democrats have canceled television ad buys in two congressional races in Philadelphia's suburbs, signaling that the races may have slipped out of reach as the party shifts money to other races that appear more competitive. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) canceled ad reservations in the Chester County-based Sixth District, where Democrat Manan Trivedi is taking on Republican Ryan Costello, and in the Bucks County-based Eighth, where U.S. Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (R., Pa.) faces a challenge from Democrat Kevin Strouse, once billed as a star DCCC recruit.

The cancellation, first reported by Politico, comes as Democrats scramble to protect incumbents, rather than trying to gain ground in a year that looks ever stronger for the GOP. "Ad reservations are changing every week, and both Manan Trivedi and Kevin Strouse are running aggressive campaigns in a tough climate," said DCCC spokesman Marc Brumer. The National Republican Congressional Committee cast the decision as Democrats waving the white flag.

The DCCC retained its \$1.3 million ad reservation in the tough South Jersey race between Democrat Aimee Belgard and Republican Tom MacArthur to replace U.S. Rep. Jon Runyan (R., N.J.). Democrats had reserved \$1.9 million to help Strouse and Trivedi before slashing their planned spending. — **philly.com**



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