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Reuters

Wireless carriers are pushing controversial legislation in Harrisburg that would give them nearly unfettered access to telephone poles, streetlights and publicly owned rights-of-way across Pennsylvania as they wire out cellphone dead zones and prepare for next-generation 5G services.

The bill is part of a national trend by telecom carriers to make it easier to boost capacity on wireless networks for data-hungry smart phones. At the same time, many local officials are livid about the bill, saying it could despoil many towns' character and constitute "rights-of-way robbery." Backers say distributed-antenna systems, or an outdoor mesh of small cells about the size of pizza boxes, will bring many amenities. They could offer high-speed broadband internet services to compete with Comcast Corp. and other cable companies, experts say. State lawmakers in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan also are considering "small cells" legislation.

Telecom carriers have told Pennsylvania legislators that the proposed bill would streamline the latest wireless build-out so that they won't have to file zoning permits for each new small cell, which takes time and can cost a river of permitting fees. But local Pennsylvania officials fear the proposed legislation could strip them of zoning powers over small cells. Hundreds of thousands of these cells will be installed across the United States over the next decade. "The goal of this is not to deal with [big cell] towers," **State Rep. Nick Miccarelli** (R., Delaware), a primary sponsor of the bill, said this week. "It's small cells that would go in existing structures, like poles and street lights." Many people in Pennsylvania "can't get cellular service, let alone these faster speeds. This would go a long way in rectifying these problems."

Other Philadelphia-area sponsors of the bill, introduced earlier this year, are Reps. **Frank A. Farry** (R., Bucks), **Gene DiGirolamo** (R., Bucks) and **Thomas P. Murt** (R., Montgomery). Last month, a hearing was scheduled in the Pennsylvania House Consumer Affairs committee but then canceled. Farry said

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[Ars Technica AT&T admits defeat in lawsuit it filed to stall Google Fiber](#)

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[Harrisburg Patriot-News Pennsylvania's 2-day-old gambling law already nets \\$1 million](#)

some towns appear to be “overzealous” in approving zoning for the small cells. But Farry added that the supporters and opponents need to find “common ground.”



Local municipal officials have balked at the bill in its current form, believing it would strip them of zoning authority over small cells that could include new utility poles in public rights of way. Those poles could be placed in historic areas or neighborhoods without local zoning, they warn. Lancaster officials have opposed a plan to put more than 70 small-cell antennas on big new poles in the city's historic areas. “The city would look god-awful with these towers all over,” Charlotte Katzenmoyer, the city's director of public works, said

earlier this year.

The heads of the Pennsylvania associations for township supervisors, boroughs, and commissioners, as well as the Pennsylvania Municipal League, sent a jointly signed letter opposing the bill to its sponsors. Dated Aug. 7, the letter said the proposed legislation “is not in the best interests of Pennsylvania.” North Wales, Reading, and other Pennsylvania local governments passed, or are considering passing, resolutions opposing the bill.

Robert Lovenheim, a supervisor in Smithfield Township, Monroe County, refers to the legislation as “rights-of-way robbery” because it takes so much authority away from local municipalities. “We have to have some zoning control, but maybe not all zoning control,” he said. “It's got to be fair on both sides.” Lovenheim also is concerned about the long-term economic consequences of the small cells. He fears that municipalities could lose their cable franchise revenue streams if consumers migrate to high-speed wireless services offered by next-generation services such as 5G for streaming entertainment.

The Pennsylvania legislation “strips municipalities of virtually all of their legal authority to regulate wireless towers and antennas,” said [Dan Cohen](#) of the Cohen Law Group in Pittsburgh, which represents local governments in cable, wireless, and broadband issues. Cohen said that municipal officials don't fault wireless carriers for boosting capacity for the “huge surge in demand for wireless services.” But town officials also want “to see orderly deployment of wireless broadband.”

Linda Kelleher, Reading city clerk, said Reading is not just concerned about 5G but subsequent new wireless services that could require even more equipment. “This time is not the last hurrah,” she said of 5G. “You really need to handle these things with care. We don't think the utility company is the best one to make these decisions.” – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

For liberal interest groups hoping to thrive in the age of President Trump, nonsensical hyperbole has become an existential necessity. After all, how can you get the attention of wealthy donors if you aren't shouting above the din of a perpetual outrage machine that's been stuck on full blast since long before Mr. Trump even took the oath of office?

As the professional left spins itself into yet another meltdown over the Federal Communications Commission's current debate over so-called "net neutrality" rules, a note of skepticism is well warranted. Is the FCC really, as the alarmist left would have you believe, about to destroy the internet as we know it? Of course not. In fact, history will likely look back on the commission's upcoming vote as a turning point that restored the bright future of broadband deployment after a failed two-year experiment in centralized government control.

The current controversy actually began back in 2015, when the Obama administration — fresh off devastating losses in the 2014 midterms — was desperately casting about for quick policy wins to distract and placate the increasingly militant left flank of the Democratic Party. At the time, the FCC was already in the process of rewriting its net neutrality rules, which a court had recently struck down for exceeding the commission's legal authority.

Net neutrality is the principle that big internet companies should not be allowed to block, throttle or discriminate against any content. Contrary to the narrative of the hysterical left, net neutrality is not particularly controversial — though it's an open question whether federal laws are needed to enforce a prohibition that market pressures in the broadband marketplace have already rendered irrelevant. The big broadband providers have already fully embraced neutrality as a core business practice, and pointed out they'd start hemorrhaging customers if they ever went back on that commitment.

But in the waning months of the Obama Administration, such common-sense market-based arguments rarely held sway. And desperate for a policy win, the White House publicly and inappropriately pressured then-FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler to scrap his middle-of-the-road net neutrality framework in favor of a radical scheme to give federal bureaucrats unprecedented authority to take over the broadband marketplace and micromanage almost every aspect of broadband providers' businesses.

In the face of this White House pressure, Mr. Wheeler caved. Ditching his initial proposal, he instead pushed to reclassify all broadband providers under "Title II" utility rules — rules that were originally written in the 1930s to regulate Depression-era landline telephone services. If you're curious what economic arguments the FCC could possibly concoct to argue that broadband technologies still evolving at the speed of light would be best served by ancient, sclerotic utility rules, you're going to be disappointed. There were none. In fact, even the FCC's own chief economist derisively dismissed the Title II order as an "economics-free zone," while a chorus of outside experts warned the utility classification would depress investment in broadband networks by introducing massive uncertainty and business risk.

Two years later, those dire predictions have borne out. Economists have confirmed that network investment is significantly lower than it would have been without the shadow of utility regulation. Meanwhile, legal experts have pointed out there are many other options for addressing the imagined bogeyman of blocking and throttling without resorting to the nuclear option of a Title II federal takeover. Faced with this growing mountain of evidence that the Title II utility rules are a disaster, current FCC Chairman Ajit Pai has led the effort to correct this mistake. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Pai has demonstrated a willingness to listen to economists — and common sense. And faced with an FCC chairman they can't bully, the radical left and their bought-and-paid-for "non-partisan" allies have instead resorted to hysteria.

They've launched a furious campaign accusing Mr. Pai of the most ridiculous conspiracy theories, when in fact he is restoring freedom for all internet users. Their inflammatory tactics have included harassing the chairman with racist comments and terrorizing his family at their home. Their tactics are despicable and their claims are beyond absurd. Repealing Title II will restore the original intent for an internet governance framework, improving the internet experience for all users.

Innovation, investment and freedom of expression in the online ecosystem only became endangered by Barack Obama's Title II takeover of the internet. The internet will only be stronger once Mr. Pai ends these investment-killing utility rules once and for all. — **Reuters opinion**

Somewhere at a comedy club, a new comedian is about to hit the stage for the first time. She will bring with her the modern tool of the trade: her cellphone, equipped with the notes she has typed, a recording app, and five minutes of material that isn't worth all that technology. This set is going to bomb. Hard. But she will repeat this process — night in, night out, until over time, that five-minute performance becomes tighter and more polished. Eventually, she'll ask a friend to use a phone to record a set. And that night she will kill. Utterly destroy the room. That will be the first time she uploads footage of herself performing to the internet. Her life will never be the same.

O.K., maybe things won't change for her overnight, but you get my point. Suddenly her material will be available to the world. Whenever anyone wants to see her set, boom! It's right there on the internet. Anyone — her friends, bookers, fellow comedians or maybe just millions of strangers — can search for it or stumble upon it. They can hit "play" and the set will immediately begin and run as seamlessly as it did that night at the comedy club. If this happens frequently enough (and it does), then her life and career will change. Then she gets the ultimate break: being invited to do the same set on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show." Instant fame.

This kind of thing has happened, countless times. And not just to comics but also to magicians, singers and people who were embarrassed on camera but managed to monetize their shame. It will happen again. But it may not happen much longer if the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Ajit Pai, follows through on his plan to roll back the network neutrality rules that ensure that anyone who puts something on the internet has a fair shot at finding a life-changing audience.

The current rules, which have been in place since 2015, ensure that internet service providers treat all data — websites, shows, emails — the same. That means nobody has to pay extra money to make sure his or her content loads quickly. This fair internet, where everyone from an amateur comedian to a celebrity to a huge media company plays by the same rules, means you don't need a lot of money or the backing of someone with power to share your content with the world.

To understand how consequential this is, imagine a young woman walking into the HBO offices and saying, "Hi, I'm an awkward black girl and I think I have some pretty hilarious misadventures that you should make into a TV show!" HBO's only question probably would have been, "How did you get in here?" Now picture this: "Hi, I'm Issa Rae. I have hundreds of thousands of YouTube subscribers and hundreds of millions of YouTube views. And I'm an awkward black girl." HBO's question: "When can you start?" I'm exaggerating. But only slightly. Issa Rae started the web series "The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl" on YouTube in 2011. Thanks in large part to its success, six years later, her comedy series, "Insecure," is set to air for a third season on HBO. It's hard to imagine this happening in a world without net neutrality.

Net neutrality is crucial to the careers of comedians like Ms. Rae and me, but it also allows content about more serious subjects to find an audience, without the endorsement or approval of traditional media gatekeepers. When the activists Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors started using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter to discuss the killing of the unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin, it began trending worldwide, eventually anchoring the modern movement against police brutality against African-Americans. It's a reminder that the people providing the sharpest and most current analysis are often not employed by major media. This is still the case: Puerto Rico recovery updates? I'm going with [@RosaClemente](#). Insightful takes on diversity in Hollywood? [@ReignOfApril](#) has them all. Weirdly perfect gifs and memes to make it through the daily news about the Trump administration? [@ParkerMolloy](#) has got me every time.

Thanks to our current net neutrality rules, when people like this take their genius beyond Twitter, to the rest of the internet, they don't have to worry about whether it's in a pay-to-play internet "fast lane" that makes access to certain types of content easier. They're in the same lane as everyone else, because net neutrality means there can be only one lane. ISPs can't do anything to stand between them and the people they want to speak to, and we all benefit.

The exchange of information and ideas that takes place on the internet is more important now than ever. To protect it, we need to keep the current net neutrality rules in places. We need them to ensure that people working to make the world better can reach their intended audiences. We need them to ensure that artists everywhere continue to have a platform through which we can discover their work. Right now, the internet is a level playing field. The question the Trump administration needs to answer is: Why would you want to change that? — **New York Times opinion**



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