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A controversial proposal related to the ability of telephone companies to withdraw basic landline service was one of several amendments added to a widespread (Ohio State House) bill dealing with environmental issues. House GOP leaders said the language is the result of a deal worked out between phone and cable companies. But advocacy groups for seniors and the poor say it remains a bad deal, as it was when a similar bill failed to pass both chambers in 2012. "This bill is a horrible idea for senior citizens; it's a horrible idea for disabled people; it's a horrible idea for people who rely on landlines," said Michael Walters, a lawyer who manages the legal hotline for the Cincinnati-based nonprofit Pro Seniors Inc.

The House Agriculture Committee expects to hear extensive testimony on the measure today. Committee Chairman Rep. Dave Hall, R-Millersburg, and Batchelder were uncertain whether the language would remain in the bill. Hall acknowledged that Gov. John Kasich does not support it. Charles R. Moses, president of the Ohio Telecom Association, said the measure would give their companies more incentive to invest in new technologies. "Ohio's current law was established to regulate a telecom system that no longer exists," he said. – *Columbus Dispatch*

The net-neutrality debate in Washington is exposing new fissures in the telecom industry. Some companies are welcoming President Barack Obama's idea of regulating the Internet like a utility, which puts them at odds with bigger cable and telephone companies that want the government to stick with its lighter touch.

Long-haul Internet carriers Cogent Communications Holdings Inc. and Level 3 Communications Inc. joined Comptel, an association of smaller telephone companies, in praising President Obama's support for applying Title II of the Telecommunications Act to the Internet, a move that would be controversial and heavily litigated but could give the principles of net neutrality a legal underpinning if it were to succeed. More importantly for those companies, the president suggested the commission could apply new rules to the interconnection points that link broadband providers like Comcast Corp. and Verizon Communications Inc. to the rest of the Internet.

Those points, where Internet traffic flows into the networks that serve Americans at home and work, have been the subject of highly public disputes this year between Netflix Inc. and broadband providers, which want the video-streaming company to bear more of the cost of handling its traffic. Companies like Level 3 and Cogent, which carry Netflix traffic to networks like Verizon's and Comcast's, are at the front end of those standoffs, which caused widespread slowdowns for millions of U.S. Internet users last year. "We are optimistic," Level 3 General Counsel Mike Mooney said. "Ten months ago, nobody thought that interconnection even belonged in this discussion."

Level 3's arguments are at odds with those made by large telecom and cable companies like Verizon, AT&T Inc. and Comcast, which have said the president's proposal could hurt investment in the Internet and lead to legal battles. Long-haul Internet carriers have been squabbling with other broadband providers for years over who should pay to carry data over the so-called last mile of cable into consumers' homes. But it wasn't until recently that the Federal Communications Commission framed those business relationships as an issue regulators needed to tackle as part of its net-neutrality proceedings.

The administration's argument for regulating broadband access under the same provisions as telephone service also gave those long-haul carriers more potential leverage than some executives had expected. Cogent softpedaled the idea of utility-style Internet oversight in a comment to the Federal Communications Commission in March, in which it said it recognized "that, for the time being, the Commission may not pursue this optimal regulatory path."

Cogent Chief Executive Dave Schaeffer said the commission might have changed its mind after data showed the standoffs between Netflix and the broadband providers slowed Internet traffic. "I think they now understand better how the plumbing of the Internet works," Mr. Schaeffer said. The debate took on more urgency after the network slowdown persisted for more than nine months, prompting widespread complaints from consumers. The Internet research group Measurement Lab, which provides some of the data the FCC uses to build its own network speed reports, said the standoffs "resulted in widespread, direct consumer harm."

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The long-haul carriers' comments reflect a broader shift that has split the telecom industry. Last month, an FCC official addressing the North American Network Operators' Group said network engineers had for most of his career told the agency to avoid touching the Internet. "More recently, people are coming in and telling us to save the Internet," FCC electromagnetic-compatibility division chief Walter Johnston said. "Times do change." – **Wall Street Journal**

For Comcast CEO Brian Roberts, the debate over net neutrality is also a debate over semantics. Roberts said Wednesday that his telecommunications conglomerate agrees in principal with President Obama's call for protecting net neutrality, which by definition would bar Internet service providers from giving preferential treatment to select companies. He said he simply disagrees with the way Obama wants to enforce the rules.

And in a news conference in San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum, Roberts insisted his company is a booster of a net neutrality — despite the fact that Comcast is already charging companies like online video streaming service Netflix to make sure its users receive reliable service — despite allegations that it is acting disingenuously. "We strongly and fundamentally disagree with that accusation," Roberts said. Roberts spoke following an event hosted by Comcast Ventures, the venture capital arm of the Philadelphia company that runs the country's largest cable system and the entertainment giant NBCUniversal.

His media appearance came two days after Obama set up a fight with big telecommunications companies like Comcast and the soon-to-be Republican-led Congress by proposing that broadband Internet companies be regulated as public utilities, under Title II of the federal Telecommunications Act. The president also called for a ban on paid access to faster service. That could preclude deals such as the agreement Comcast reached with Los Gatos' Netflix.

In February, Netflix agreed to pay Comcast to ensure that its subscribers received faster, more reliable service if they had broadband through Comcast. The two companies later bickered over who caused the degraded service Netflix reported late last year. Comcast responded to the president's speech on Monday by saying the company supports an open Internet, but that another section of the Telecommunications Act that imposes a "light touch" on regulations. Comcast critics noted that the company was abiding by net neutrality rules imposed by government regulators only after it merged with NBCUniversal. Those government regulators — the Federal Communications Commission — are working on drafting new net neutrality rules.

Roberts did not directly criticize Obama's decision to take a strong stand on net neutrality this week, but was opposed on the technical issues about how big telecom providers will be regulated. He said Comcast is "comfortable" that government and the telecom industry can hammer out an agreement eventually. "What we don't want to do is somehow have price regulations in a business that's competitive," he said. AT&T reacted to Obama's stance Wednesday by saying it would stop investing in its plans to build high-speed fiber-optic broadband systems in about 100 U.S. cities until the net neutrality debate is settled.

But Roberts said Comcast has not made any decisions to scale back its capital investments in light of the renewed debate.

He also said he doesn't think the debate will affect Comcast's proposed acquisition of Time Warner Cable, although Obama's speech sent stock prices for both companies down. At the press event, Comcast unveiled a voice-activated TV remote control and an audio-enabled programming guide to help the visually impaired. – **San Francisco Chronicle; more in [New York Times](#)**

Democrats in Pennsylvania cheered Republican Gov. Tom Corbett's ouster last week. But winning the governorship may not assuage the loss of their top Republican ally, Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, who was deposed in a GOP leadership election on Wednesday.

Notwithstanding the Republican governor's 10-point defeat to Democrat Tom Wolf, Republicans picked up eight seats in the state House and three in the Senate. The gains bolster the GOP majority in the Senate to 30-20 and 119-84 in the House. That's not strong enough to override a veto, but Democrats will now have a hard time passing legislation merely by picking off some moderate Republicans. Many of Mr. Corbett's governing priorities, such as pension reform and liquor-store privatization, foundered in the statehouse because of intraparty squabbles between his caucus's moderate and conservative wings. Public unions were able to block reforms by bribing or browbeating a couple of Republican senators or a dozen or so House members. Democrats often used Mr. Pileggi as their liaison.

The Senate Majority leader was known to act as a double agent, publicly backing legislation while working behind the scenes to kill it. Former Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell has described Mr. Pileggi as

“the most powerful person in Harrisburg.” Conservative state Sen. Scott Wagner described him earlier this year as “the number one obstacle in the Senate.” Last week another conservative, state Sen. Jake Corman, announced plans to challenge Mr. Pileggi for majority leader. Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, who appears to have tired of being upstaged by his second-in-control, gave the challenger his blessing and backing. Although Mr. Corman lost to Mr. Pileggi in a leadership fight in 2006, he avenged his defeat this year.

Mr. Pileggi’s defeat reasserts conservative supremacy and further marginalizes Democrats in the statehouse. Mr. Wolf’s best hope of enacting a progressive tax and other liberal priorities was to work with Mr. Pileggi to bribe other moderate Republicans with pork. Mr. Pileggi’s district has been one of the biggest recipients of earmarks. The loss also squashes Mr. Pileggi’s own gubernatorial and Senate ambitions. As someone wryly remarked to us, imagine if only the political career of a rising state senator from Illinois had been nipped in the bud. – **Wall Street Journal**



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