

**philly.com**  
[How Comcast decides what you'll watch next \(hint: it's not algorithms\)](#)

**Reuters**  
[DISH, Comcast SportsNet reach deal in regional dispute](#)

**engadget.com**  
[The FCC gets to work on letting internet TV compete with cable](#)

**MSNBC**  
[Internet rights are civil rights](#)

**Associated Press**  
[New lawmakers bring fresh eyes to Pa.'s problems](#)

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**  
[Who's minding the store for legislative ethics?](#)

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
[Kane's account of sting draws increasing fire](#)

For almost a century, that wired-to-the-wall telephone has been an indispensable fixture in the American home, its tinny ring the defining sound of an era. Will it soon be silenced?

AT&T and others are trying to cut the cord on the old analog telephone system that has tied the country together for generations, with a coordinated campaign to change telecommunications law state by state. In one key battle brewing in Illinois, the industry wants to rescind a state requirement that it maintain those copper-wire networks. The companies say it's a matter of giving consumers what they want — cellphones,



broadband and other 21st-century digital options — instead of keeping their capital tied up in the telecom equivalent of a horse-and-buggy system.

But others, including AARP, say issues such as sound quality, service

reliability and cost favor the old landlines. They worry that if AT&T is freed of its legal obligation to maintain those lines — a goal the telecom giant is poised to pursue in Illinois in 2015 — it will leave some rural, poor and special-needs residents with no viable phone service. AARP is an advocacy group for older adults. “Across the nation, about six in 10 adults still rely on landlines,” said Gerardo Cardenas, spokesman for AARP-Illinois. “It’s not just older people. It’s people in rural areas, because they sometimes can’t get cell service. And it’s lower-income folks.” For those populations, he said, “landlines are lifelines.”

The Illinois Telecommunications Act, which governs the industry statewide, is up for renewal next year. AT&T and others are widely expected to seek a fundamental change: the elimination of wording that requires the industry to guarantee the availability of traditional landline service to everyone in the state. Some major carriers, including AT&T, are designated in the current law as “carriers of last resort,” meaning they’re obligated by law to maintain those analog landlines within their service areas. The premise is that they might otherwise abandon low-profit rural areas and leave those residents with no phone options.

Landline defenders like the Illinois Citizens Utility Board, a consumer group, note that

**Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**  
**The language of bribery from the Philly legislative sting case**

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
**Report: McCaffery only judge to send improper e-mails**

cellphones and some digital phone lines don't work well with remote medical monitoring devices, faxes and other technology that was built around analog phone lines. CUB and AARP are spearheading [SaveOurPhoneService.com](http://SaveOurPhoneService.com), a campaign to rally support against changing the Illinois law. "Smartphones are wonderful technology, but they don't come cheap, and anybody who has traveled across Illinois knows they're not always reliable," CUB Executive Director David Kolata said in a written statement. "Traditional home phone service is the most affordable, reliable option for millions of people, and we shouldn't take away that choice."

The industry argues that to require some companies to maintain the landlines is anachronistic in a telecom market where there is widespread competition. To the argument that ditching the landline requirement might leave some people without phone service, they point out that most people already have cellphones in addition to their landlines — if they choose to have landlines at all. Increasingly, they don't. State-by-state figures compiled by the national industry group USTelecom show that, in 2008, 77 percent of Illinois households had landlines, while 23 percent relied on wireless only. By the end of 2012, landline households had dropped to 57 percent, and wireless-only had risen to 43 percent. Missouri's trends were similar.

While some residents may romanticize the analog landline, the companies that have to maintain them don't. The industry's techno-jargon even has a bluntly dismissive acronym for it: POTS, for "plain old telephone service." "Illinois would remain a rotary-dial state in a broadband and wireless world" if landline lovers prevent the change in the telecommunications law, AT&T Illinois President Paul La Schiazza warned in a written statement. He said Illinois has a choice to either prepare for "the digital future," or "cling to outdated policies designed for 100-year-old technology."

Missouri already has edged toward the kind of change AT&T is seeking in Illinois. In 2011, Missouri eliminated its previous "carrier of last resort" obligation on carriers in St. Louis County, St. Louis and Kansas City. The rationale was that, with so many different telecommunications companies competing for customers in those populous areas, it was unnecessary to have a law that required any one company to provide service. "In a world where there is a monopoly on telecommunication service, [the previous law] made sense," said Ric Telthorst, president of the Missouri Telecommunications Industry Association. "In a world where there are this many choices, it makes a lot less sense."

Charting the fall of the traditional copper-and-switch analog landline is complicated, because it isn't just cellphones that have been replacing it. A different type of landline, called Voice Over Internet Protocol or VoIP, also has encroached, using the Internet to provide phone, broadband and other digital services through a variety of companies. If you get your home phone service "bundled" through a nontraditional provider such as Comcast or Charter, you aren't using the kind of phone lines that AT&T is trying to cut, even though your phone might look the same. But even with the addition of VoIP lines, the total number of physical wire-in-the-wall phones in Illinois, as nationally, has dropped dramatically in recent years.

Figures from state and federal regulators show Illinois had about 9 million active landlines in 2001, most of them using the traditional phone technology of the time. By the end of 2013, the state had a little over 5 million lines — and fewer than 3 million of those were traditional lines. Those figures include business customers. In terms of just residential phone lines that use traditional telephone technology, a mere 1.3 million are left in Illinois today. At the same time, the number of wireless subscribers in Illinois has climbed from about 5.6 million in 2001 to about 12.8 million by the end of 2013.

The industry points to those numbers to argue that it's the consumers, not the phone companies, who have decided that traditional landlines should go the way of the hula hoop. Those particular consumers don't include Harry Gault of Swansea. "I've had this line since around 1970," said Gault, 82, a retired salesman. "My wife has a cellphone, but I very seldom ever use one. To me, it's the quality of it. The cellphone doesn't work like a

landline. A lot of times, they just fade out. "To myself and other people, it would be unjust to have to go into a cellphone and a different technology," Gault added. The landline is "a service that needs to be available." Constance Green, 68, of Cahokia, agreed. "I have a cellphone which I barely use," she said. "The landline is what I've used all my life." She admits part of the appeal is that "I'm older and set in my ways," but she added: "It is clearer. I think it's more dependable." – *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

---

Republicans in Congress appear likely to introduce legislation next month aimed at preventing Internet providers from speeding up some Web sites over others, in hopes of changing the tone of a critical debate over the future of the Web, according to industry officials familiar with the plans.

The industry-backed proposal would preempt efforts by the Federal Communications Commission to draw up new rules for Internet providers. While key details of the proposed bill are still being hammered out, the legislation would attempt to end a debate over the FCC's power to regulate net neutrality, or the idea that broadband companies should treat all Internet traffic equally, said the people familiar with the plan who declined to be named because the talks were private.

The industry officials said they are discussing details of the proposal with several Republican lawmakers, whom they declined to name. The officials also said the proposal is being backed by several large telecommunications companies, which they also declined to name. One important piece of the proposed legislation would establish a new way for the FCC to regulate broadband providers by creating a separate provision of the Communications Act known as "Title X," the people said. Title X would enshrine elements of the tough net neutrality principles called for by President Obama last month. For example, it would give FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler the authority to prevent broadband companies from blocking or slowing traffic to Web sites, or charging content companies such as Netflix for faster access to their subscribers — a tactic known as "paid prioritization." But those new powers would come with a trade-off, the people said. In exchange for Title X, the FCC would refrain from regulating net neutrality using Title II of the Communications Act — a step favored by many advocates of aggressive regulation, including the president, they said. FCC officials declined to comment for this story.

Broadband providers have strongly opposed aggressive net neutrality rules, arguing it would stymie the industry's growth. But in recent months some industry officials have said they were open to the same net neutrality principles advocated by Obama, highlighting a sliver of potential common ground between Internet providers and net neutrality advocates. In a blog post last month, Comcast said it opposed blocking or slowing traffic to Web sites, along with paid prioritization. AT&T made similar arguments in June. "We oppose the concept of fast lanes and slow lanes on the Internet," wrote Jim Cicconi, an AT&T policy executive, in a blog post.

The Internet service providers' statements offer a potential opening for a legislative compromise, one that seeks to clarify the FCC's authority to preserve net neutrality while avoiding a showdown over Title II. "Consensus on this issue is really not that far apart," said an industry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were ongoing. "There's common understanding that rules are needed to protect consumers." While Republican aides to both the Senate and House commerce committees declined to comment on the industry's proposal, the timing of the push is consistent with statements by top GOP lawmakers on the issue. Earlier this month, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), the top Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee, said he was "very interested" in drafting legislation to address net neutrality. Congress would need to act "fairly soon next year" if it wants to find a legislative fix, according to a Thune spokeswoman. Any such legislation would have to move through Thune's committee.

The FCC is widely expected to unveil its net neutrality proposal in February or March, leaving little time for lawmakers to introduce a bill. By unveiling their legislation before

Wheeler's draft rules, Republicans could draw momentum away from the agency, where pressure has been mounting lately for stronger action, the industry officials said. If Wheeler struck first with proposed rules with aggressive net neutrality rules, many Democrats would likely find it harder to support a Republican alternative. On Thursday, Democrats led by Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) sent a bicameral letter to Wheeler demanding that he act more swiftly to adopt new rules. "We urge you to act without delay to finalize rules that keep the Internet free and open for business," the letter read.

Other Democrats signaled this week that any legislation on net neutrality would have to satisfy several key requirements. For example, the bill could not curtail the FCC's existing powers under the Communications Act, said David Grossman, Eshoo's senior tech policy adviser, at a Washington conference Tuesday. In addition to incorporating Obama's principles about blocking or slowing traffic, the legislation would also have to apply to wireless carriers, Grossman added. Aside from a few provisions, wireless carriers have been largely exempted from the FCC's previous net neutrality rules.

Republicans may find it difficult to attract enough conservative support for a net neutrality bill that updates the FCC's powers. Many of the most outspoken critics of the agency, such as Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) or Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), ardently oppose any new regulations on Internet providers. But with enough bipartisan support, Republicans could quickly move a bill to Obama's desk. Whether the president signs it could hinge on whether he could claim it as a political victory, policy analysts say. If the bill is seen as not aggressive enough, Obama will likely veto the legislation, observers said. Cast as a compromise giving the FCC wide latitude over net neutrality, the bill could pass — particularly if industry officials offer not to sue the FCC over its proposed rules, analysts have said. — *Washington Post*



127 State Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101  
717.214.2000 • bcaps.com

**First in Broadband.  
The Future of Broadband.®**