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Comcast Corp., which has pledged greater support for local tech start-ups, will be the title sponsor of Philly Tech Week in April - an event that drew 20,000 participants in 2014. The cable-TV and media giant has said that it would like to energize the tech scene in Center City ahead of the 2018 opening of its new skyscraper.

The Comcast Innovation and Technology Center, designed as the tallest building in Philadelphia, will house the company's new-product development teams and engineering. Comcast officials believe the city has to burnish its entrepreneurial reputation to allow the firm to recruit talented employees. Comcast would like Philadelphia to be ranked among the nation's top entrepreneurial cities for technology firms, with Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, and New York City, Sam Schwartz, the company's chief business development officer, said Tuesday. "Philadelphia has all the elements to be on that list," Schwartz said.

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Christopher Wink, cofounder and editorial director of Technical.ly, the online publication that organizes Philly Tech Week, would not disclose the financial terms of Comcast's sponsorship. This year's event is scheduled for April 17 to 25. Last year, Comcast participated in the weeklong event by hosting a closing party for 1,200 people in its lobby and pavilion, Wink said. The sponsorship expands Comcast's involvement, he noted.

Technical.ly reports on the start-up community in Philadelphia and has sister publications covering the same topic in Brooklyn, Baltimore, Washington, and Delaware. It is based in University City; its website is www.technical.ly. Technology start-ups won't replace the hundreds of thousands of jobs - mostly in manufacturing - that Philadelphia lost over the last 50 years, but they are an important and growing sector, Wink said. – **Philadelphia Inquirer**

President Obama is once again challenging major cable and telephone companies by encouraging the Federal

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Communications Commission to pre-empt state laws that stifle competition for high-speed Internet service.

Obama wants to expand access to broadband communications services, siding with local communities that want either to expand competition or provide municipal services themselves. To promote it, he is announcing that his administration will provide technical and financial assistance to towns and cities that want to improve Internet service for their residents. The modest proposals do not require congressional approval and are part of a series of measures Obama is rolling out before his State of the Union address next week. Obama will detail his broadband plans Wednesday in Cedar Falls, Iowa, a community that has taken steps to provide high-speed Internet to its residents.

The administration's stance would put it at odds with major cable and telephone companies such as AT&T, Comcast and Time Warner Cable Inc., that currently provide Internet service, often with little or no competition. Obama has already angered the industry by calling for new FCC rules that treat Internet service providers as public utilities. In a White House video before the announcement, Obama says: "You know what it feels like when you don't have a good Internet connection. Everything is buffering, you try to download a video and you've got that little circle thing that goes round and round, it's really aggravating." "There are real world consequences to this and it makes us less economically competitive," he says.

Jeff Zients, director of Obama's National Economic Council, said Obama wants to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to press the FCC, an independent regulatory agency, to "ensure that all states have a playing field that allows for a vibrant and competitive market for communication services." Nineteen states place restrictions on municipal broadband networks, many with laws encouraged by cable and telephone companies. Advocates of those laws say they are designed to protect taxpayers from municipal projects that are expensive, can fail or may be unnecessary.

The FCC is already considering requests for Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Wilson, North Carolina, to prevent state laws from blocking the expansion of their broadband projects. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said in June that local communities that want to provide their own broadband service "shouldn't be stopped by state laws promoted by cable and telephone companies that don't want that competition." A new White House report says that while 94 percent of Americans living in urban areas can purchase an Internet connection of 25 megabits per second, only 51 percent of Americans in rural areas have access to such Internet speeds. The report also says that because of lack of competition three out of four Americans lack a choice for such Internet service.

The White House also announced that the Commerce Department would promote greater broadband access by hosting regional workshops and offering technical assistance to communities. The Department of Agriculture also will provide grants and loans of \$40 million to \$50 million to assist rural areas. A council comprising more than a dozen government agencies will also seek to remove regulatory and policy barriers that hinder broadband competition, the White House said. – ***Associated Press; also see Politico***

U.S. cable and satellite TV providers are rolling out new services to solve a problem that drives customers crazy — which channel is HBO? And how do I find the latest episode of *The Walking Dead*? Faced with competition from Internet upstarts with graphic guides that are relatively painless to use, traditional media companies are adding voice control to remotes, cutting the number of buttons and reducing clutter from screens.

The companies are adopting the technology to help keep customers from canceling subscriptions in favor of streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu, which are far cheaper and also come with user-friendly guides to make finding shows easier. As consumers become used to easy-to-search websites and mobile apps that load video with a few clicks, the clunky navigation of older TV guides has stoked major frustration in living

rooms. “Every consumer will agree it’s terrible,” Forrester Research analyst James McQuivey said.

At the Consumer Electronics Show last week in Las Vegas, TV operators showed how they are building on efforts of recent years to move away from their traditional linear, scroll-down grids. Newer guides have more pictures and make searching easier. Charter Communications unveiled a new guide that will automatically appear on its customers’ televisions this year. Features include user recommendations, similar to a strategy employed by Netflix. Simplicity, search and discovery — “all the things you expect in a modern guide” — are included, Charter CEO Tom Rutledge said.

Making TV shows and movies easier to find helps keep customers, said Dan Simmons, director of connected home research for the research company IHS. “If there is so much stuff going on that you can’t find what you want, it doesn’t feel like a value,” he said. “If you can demonstrate the value of that pay-TV service, people aren’t going to cut the cord.” – **Reuters**

I am writing in regard to Verizon's (my local landline phone service provider) attempt to end phone service that my family has used for years. Evidently Verizon would like to continue with a wireless phone service and drop land-line service completely. The Pennsylvania legislature was lobbied by Verizon earlier in 2014 in an attempt to deregulate the existing landline service that they provide. Seniors, workers and consumers opposed this attempt and the legislature declined to act on the deregulation proposal.

At this time, Verizon is attempting to have the Public Utility Commission (PUC) deregulate most of the Verizon operations in Pennsylvania. Our elected representatives would be bypassed and the deregulation proposal could become enacted without an open legislative discussion. If Verizon would obtain this change, existing cost controls for landline phone service will disappear and costs will surely increase.

Current regulations force Verizon to maintain the infrastructure for landline phone service in most of the state and especially in rural areas. Current customers may be forced to switch to wireless telephone service, which is less reliable. Seniors are at risk when calling for help during emergencies if they are faced with unfamiliar and sometimes confusing new technology.

I urge current Verizon landline phone service users who have concerns to contact the PUC and their respective legislative representatives and tell them to protect consumers from these Verizon proposals. We want to avoid increased phone costs and reduced reliability for our phone service. – **Letter to the editor from Harrisburg resident on pennlive.com**



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