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Comcast Corp. is looking for few good start-ups. The cable giant is formally launching an “accelerator” program to boost start-ups in Philadelphia by [accepting applications](#) for the first round of its Techstars program, part of what Comcast calls its Lift Labs. The program will be based in Comcast’s \$1.2 billion product-development and engineering high-rise, [under construction near its headquarters](#).

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Comcast expects to include 10 individuals — or small teams — as participants. The free program is open to those in the Philadelphia region, as well as those from other places, as long as they are willing to relocate here. Applicants should be developing businesses with any of these themes: connected life, entertainment everywhere, next-generation marketing, smart cities, and digital wellness. Comcast is accepting applications through April 8. The program will run from July 16 to Oct. 11. “The plan is to have them in the new building, and they will be based on the fourth floor,” said Ebony

Lee, Comcast senior vice president for strategic development.

Accepting people into the program may lead to companies’ choosing to stay here and build their businesses, Lee said. Comcast also could learn from these start-up founders, she added. Comcast spoke to more than 1,000 start-ups and entrepreneurs in modeling the accelerator, which basically attempts to make it easier for entrepreneurs to transform a raw idea into a product or service. Other big corporations with accelerators include AT&T, Sprint, Disney, Coca-Cola, Wells Fargo, and Budweiser, [according to online publication TechCo](#).

John Grady, president of the nonprofit Philadelphia Industrial Development Corp., said the program could “contribute a ton of value” to a start-up through relationships with Comcast and NBCUniversal executives, along with the resources and experience of program organizers and exposure to the business community. Rick Nucci, co-founder and chief executive of the Philadelphia tech company Guru and chairman of the nonprofit Philly Startup Leaders, said accelerators have proved to help start-ups achieve their goals faster. He said the program could attract companies to Philadelphia that otherwise would not come here.

Techstars is a Colorado-based group that runs programs to help start-ups. It is partnering with Comcast as it seeks to boost start-up and technology companies in Center City to complement its big investment in the new tech center. One concern for Comcast is whether it will have enough technologists and software coders as it concentrates product development in Philadelphia.

Participants in the Techstars program will rub elbows with Comcast, NBCUniversal, Telemundo and Universal executives, and network with other start-ups as they develop their ideas. The Facebook application looks relatively simple, with 13 questions, looking at the start-up's vision, plans, funding, cash burn rate, and equity owners. "We look forward to bringing some of the world's brightest entrepreneurs to Philadelphia and working side by side with our partners at Techstars, while leveraging Comcast NBCUniversal's unique set of assets to help take their businesses to the next level," said Sam Schwartz, chief business development officer at Comcast's cable division. – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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In the wake of a controversial move by the Federal Communications Commission to deregulate the broadband industry, a group of 22 attorneys general — including Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania — has sued the commission for its repeal of **net neutrality** rules. **The group filed a petition** for review in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, citing the order to remove net neutrality regulations as "arbitrary, capricious and an abuse of discretion."

Net neutrality rules barred companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon from interfering with internet traffic and favoring their own sites and apps. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai's push to undo them inspired both street and online protests in defense of the Obama-era rules. "The vote by the Federal Communications Commission last month to gut net neutrality threatens to end the internet as we know it," Mr. Shapiro said in a release. "The FCC's action undermines free speech and is bad for consumers and business — especially startups and small businesses. "I filed this lawsuit today with my colleagues to stop this rollback from being implemented."

The move comes as 50 U.S. senators endorsed a legislative measure to override the FCC's decision to deregulate the broadband industry, top Democrats said Monday. The tally leaves supporters just one vote shy of the 51 required to pass a Senate resolution of disapproval, in a legislative gambit aimed at restoring the agency's net neutrality rules. To win passage of the resolution, its supporters must recruit one more Republican member to their ranks. But the measure must survive the Republican-majority House and be signed by President Donald Trump to take effect.

After an independent agency makes a decision — such as the FCC's net neutrality deregulation — federal lawmakers have a window of 60 legislative days to reverse the move under the Congressional Review Act. As of last Tuesday, 40 senators had signed onto the resolution to challenge the FCC under the act. Since then, another 10 have joined the effort.

Mr. Shapiro noted that the FCC's net neutrality rollback came at the same time **two million fraudulent comments** were submitted to the commission's website, including at least 100,000 fake comments attributed to Pennsylvanians. Since then, his office has created a website, **badcomments.attorneygeneral.gov**, so consumers can check to see if their name had been used in a false comment. As of Tuesday, 3,323 people filed that their identities were used to submit fake comments. "The theft of someone's voice in our democracy cannot stand, and we must get to the bottom of this massive identity theft," Mr. Shapiro said. "That is a compelling reason the FCC should not press forward with its action to rollback Net Neutrality rules." – *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

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Pennsylvania's high court will hear arguments on Wednesday on whether the state's congressional districts were illegally drawn to benefit Republican lawmakers, a case that could have major ramifications for the 2018 midterm elections. The challenge, brought by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, a civic advocacy group, and several Democratic voters, is one of several lawsuits nationwide seeking to limit politicians from drawing lines to give one party the advantage in elections, a practice known as partisan gerrymandering.

If the court rules for the plaintiffs, it could order new maps in time for the 2018 elections, giving Democrats a better chance of picking up several congressional seats and increasing their odds of retaking control of the U.S. House of Representatives from Republicans. Despite Pennsylvania's status as a battleground state in presidential elections, Republicans have held 13 of its 18 congressional seats since the latest map was produced in 2011 by the Republican-led state legislature. Nationwide, Democrats need to flip two dozen seats to regain control of the House.

The state is considered one of the most gerrymandered in the country, giving rise to derogatory nicknames like "Goofy Kicking Donald Duck" for the bizarrely shaped 7th Congressional

District. Following a weeklong trial in December, a state judge, Kevin Brobson, ruled the plaintiffs had shown the map was drawn to benefit Republicans. But he said they failed to prove a constitutional violation because they did not spell out a legal standard to differentiate “between permissible partisan considerations and unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering.”

The state Supreme Court, which has jurisdiction over the case, is free to adopt or reject Brobson’s findings. Five of the court’s seven judges are Democrats. The case is similar to a challenge the U.S. Supreme Court is considering, in which Democrats have argued that Wisconsin Republicans violated the U.S. Constitution by drawing district lines that deprived Democratic voters of their free speech and equal protection rights. The court is scheduled to rule on that case by June. The Pennsylvania lawsuit, however, relies on the state constitution, not the federal one.

The U.S. Supreme Court has previously suggested that partisan gerrymandering could run afoul of the Constitution but has never articulated a standard to measure such a violation. Partisan gerrymandering has grown more potent with the advent of mapmaking technology and precise voter data, according to critics. Last week, a split panel of federal judges rejected a separate challenge to Pennsylvania’s congressional district lines. In North Carolina, U.S. judges ordered that state to redraw its maps because of unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering. – **Reuters**

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The Pennsylvania Legislature's longest-serving member, Democratic State Rep. Thomas Caltagirone, is seeking another term despite Gov. Tom Wolf's calls for him to step down over a \$250,000 sexual harassment settlement. Caltagirone, 75, of Reading, was first elected in 1976 and took office the following year. His decision to seek his 22nd term was first reported by the Reading Eagle.

In 2015, the House Democratic Caucus spent \$248,000 to settle a sexual harassment claim against Caltagirone, according to reports by The Philadelphia Inquirer and Pittsburgh Post Gazette. After the story was published, Wolf and Democratic lawmakers like Mike Schlossberg, D-Lehigh, called for Caltagirone to resign. He has declined to heed their recommendations, maintaining he did nothing wrong.

In 1996, then-state Attorney General Tom Corbett opted not to file criminal charges against Caltagirone in another case involving alleged sexual harassment and gun-related threats to a former staffer, Marci Santoro. Caltagirone maintained his innocence and said the probe, originally launched by Former Attorney General Ernie Preate Jr., was politically motivated. Preate was a Republican who served a prison term for a federal charge of mail fraud. Caltagirone chairs the House Consumer Affairs Committee and prior to that was the top Democratic on the Judiciary Committee. – **Allentown Morning Call**

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Political scientists, journalists and civic leaders will discuss President Donald Trump’s first year in office during a panel discussion Thursday at Keystone College. Titled “President Donald Trump after one year: How have we changed and where are we headed?” the panel discussion, which is free and open to the public, is comprised of Keystone College political science professor Jeff Brauer, Wilkes University political science professor Thomas J. Baldino, Ph.D., Times-Tribune columnist Chris Kelly, Washington Examiner columnist and CNN analyst Salena Zito, Lackawanna County Recorder of Deeds Evie Rafalko McNulty and Eckel Farms owner Keith Eckel.

The moderator, Pennsylvania Cable Network Vice President of Programming Francine Schertzer, will provide discussion topics and the public will have the opportunity to ask questions. Fran Calpin, Keystone College senior director of college relations, worked with Brauer to organize the forum. “This isn’t a debate,” Calpin said. “It’s basically to hold an informative and civil discussion on President Trump’s first year in office and taking a look at what 2018 might hold.” This is the first time the college has held a discussion on a president’s first year in office, he said. “We want the public to walk out saying, ‘I really learned something tonight, this was an interesting and enjoyable night,’” Calpin said.

With Saturday being the anniversary of Trump’s inauguration, Brauer felt it would be a good opportunity to hold the forum. “It’s natural that on anniversaries, we look back on politicians, particularly presidents, and what they have accomplished in that time period,” Brauer said. “It’s really to give them a chance to learn, to observe, to ask questions, to voice their ideas and their concerns in a healthy and civil way so that we can have a healthy dialogue.” The political scientists will provide “more of a neutral voice” with an “analytical scientific approach,” and the journalists will provide local and national media perspectives, Brauer said. Eckel will represent the Republican voice and McNulty will represent the Democratic voice, Calpin said. – **Hazleton Standard-Speaker**



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