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The Washington County commissioners have adopted a resolution supporting legislation that would change the way countywide 911 systems are funded.

Washington County taxpayers, according to the 2015 budget, are expected to contribute \$800,000 to the 911 system, an increase of 14.3 percent from 2014. The infusion of cash from taxpayers has fluctuated between \$500,000 and \$800,000 over the past decade because the amount of 911 funding from landline telephones steadily decreased. "I don't know if there's any county that's going to have a self-sufficient 911 center under the current law," Roger Metcalfe, county finance director, said Friday. "I'd be almost positive that there are none that would have their revenues exceed their expenditures. We're seeing regular increases in personnel costs. Landline money is not coming in consistently."

According to a draft prepared by the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, the legislation would rewrite the 911 Public Safety Telephone Act, including a comprehensive revision of governance, accountability, technology references, distribution of fees and rate of fees. Its intent is to recognize that the state and counties need to not just maintain current systems, but invest in the ability to respond in the future based on technology and citizens' and corporate expectations.

The legislation removes three "silos" in the existing law that treat land lines, wireless, prepaid wireless and Voice over Internet Protocol phone systems as separate technologies for planning, funding and auditing.

According to the draft, the monthly subscriber rate would be set uniformly at \$2, doubling the current \$1 fee for wireless, prepaid wireless and VoIP. The current fee is between \$1 and \$1.50 for landlines, depending on a county's classification. Washington, under state law, is a fourth-class county.

The measure would accommodate and encourage adaptation to next-generation technologies, such as text, video and social media, without restricting the law, and would allow adaptation to technologies that have not yet been identified. A 911 board would be given two years to develop and submit a report and recommendation on the impacts of current and anticipated technological and market changes on 911 service, including the structure and adequacy of the 911 surcharge and 911 fund. Counties would retain the right to assure there is 911 service throughout their jurisdiction, and development, deployment, upgrade, maintenance and operation of the 911 systems would remain

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under local ownership and control.

With the end of the Emergency Telephone Act looming at the end of June, the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee last month held a public hearing to gather testimony on the "True Costs of E-911" in Pennsylvania, according to state Sen. Randy Vulakovich, committee chairman. Those testifying included representatives from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, CCAP and a panel of officials from the Allegheny, Philadelphia, Tioga and Westmoreland county 911 centers.

"This committee certainly recognizes the costs of the service," Vulakovich, a former municipal police officer, said in a news release. "Equipment must be constantly upgraded and personnel trained and compensated. We also know the value of the service in terms of public safety. We were also presented with several options as to how to ease the increasing financial burden being placed on counties across the commonwealth. We will take this information into consideration over the coming weeks and months as we work toward reauthorization of E-911." — **Washington (PA) Observer-Reporter**

The Federal Communications Commission's vote last week to regulate the Internet shows a dangerous and reckless disregard for the free market principles that are the engine of the U.S. economy.

As a member of Congress and a businessman for over 30 years, I strongly oppose FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler's unprecedented plan to reclassify the Internet as a public utility. A massive layer of government regulation — 332 pages to be exact — not only threatens the online freedoms enjoyed by Americans across the country but stifles the innovation and entrepreneurship that is the lifeblood of the digital economy.

As I reminded Chairman Wheeler in a letter last month, the Internet's rapid proliferation is the result of exceptional American innovation, free of government intrusion. Government regulation of the Internet is all too common in countries like China, Iran and North Korea. That is not a model for America. The Progressive Policy Institute estimated that treating the Internet like a phone service, as the FCC voted to do last week, would trigger new taxes and fees up to \$15 billion a year, including \$67 for each wired service and \$72 for wireless in state and local taxes.

I agree wholeheartedly with FCC commissioner Ajit Pai, who voted against this scheme, when he said the proposal "mimics ObamaCare" both in substance and process and represents "a solution that won't work to a problem that doesn't exist." The Internet is working just fine — it has been for the nearly two decades since its inception. As the saying goes — "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Mark Cuban, a successful Internet businessman, put it more succinctly when he was asked about the FCC's plan last week: "That will (*foul*) everything up."

It is telling that Chairman Wheeler refused to testify before Congress about his plan before he put it to the Commission for a vote. It is also telling that a Democrat FCC Commissioner called on Chairman Wheeler to roll back parts of this sweeping plan so the Commissioners and the public could have more time to consider it.

It is ironic that the FCC's own mission statement on its own website says the Commission is supposed to be tasked with "promoting competition, innovation and investment in broadband services and facilities." The plan approved last week will have exactly the opposite effect. I have a responsibility to my constituents to provide oversight of the FCC and ensure that its actions do not harm the very people it is supposed to serve. However, I fear that is precisely what will happen as a result of the FCC's action last week.

That is why I support a resolution of disapproval to overturn this outrageous power grab

by FCC bureaucrats. Under the Congressional Review Act, Congress has expedited authority to stop federal regulations after they are issued. It's important that Congress pass this resolution even if President Obama vetoes it. It should also be noted that President Obama has expressed support for just the type of regulatory framework approved by the FCC last week.

In classic Orwellian double speak, the FCC and President Obama have cynically dubbed this proposal 'network neutrality.' Make no mistake: there is nothing neutral about it! "Net neutrality" is nothing more than cynical political spin that Don Draper of the TV show "Mad Men" would be proud of.

America has always been a beacon of freedom, and we must continue to lead as a model for other nations in this digital age. At a time when many Americans feel their freedoms are being threatened by government overreach, the last thing we need is a new layer of government regulation that hinders access to a free and open Internet. – **Opinion from Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL), House Ways and Means Committee member, on foxnews.com**



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