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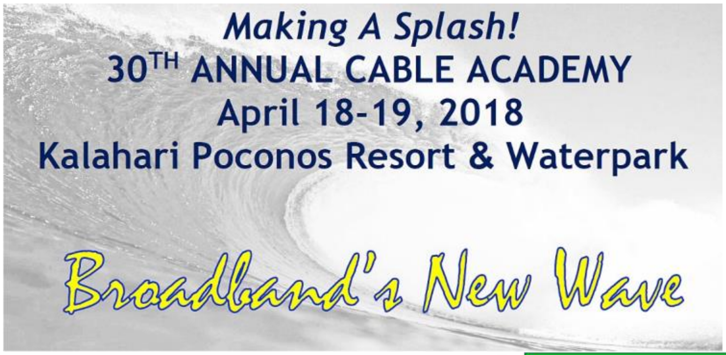

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Americans watch television with 225 million set-top boxes. They run day and night, when the TV is on or off. The electric bill runs into the billions of dollars for consumers. Critics also say they're bad for the environment, contributing millions of tons of carbon emissions from power plants.

On Thursday, Comcast Corp. and others in the pay-TV industry renewed a voluntary agreement with energy advocates to make set-top boxes more efficient, a pact initially spurred by the threat of new regulations or laws during the Obama administration. And experts reiterated that the easiest way to save money is to ensure that you have only one set-top box with a DVR in your house; many people have multiple boxes.

Pay-TV customers are saving about $1 billion a year in lower electric bills from efficiency improvements to set-top boxes so far, Noah Horowitz, a director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said Thursday. The deal will set standards that must be met on new set-top boxes over the next four years. By 2020, new set-top boxes will be 40 percent more energy efficient than those in 2012, or before the first agreement, he said. But Horowitz added that "we remain disappointed by how much power these boxes use when no one is watching TV or recording a show."

Participants in the pact, besides the Natural Resources Defense Council, are the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, the pay-TV trade association NCTA and the Consumer Technology Association. Companies that signed on include Comcast, AT&T, Charter, Dish, Verizon, Cox, Cablevision, Frontier, and CenturyLink. Set-top boxes are the black devices that cable- and satellite-TV companies use to convert their data signals to television pictures. Consumers typically lease them from Comcast, AT&T, and other pay-TV operators.

Robert Turner, an official with Horsham's Arris Group, a big set-top box manufacturer and also a signatory, said that the set-top boxes "power down" — or use less electricity — when they're not being used but they don't shut down. He also said that big energy savings with set-top boxes have been achieved by eliminating multiple set-top boxes with DVRs in homes. One set-top box with a DVR — or a "whole-home DVR" setup, with other televisions connected through an in-home network over WiFi — can replace multiple set-top boxes and save electricity, he said. Set-top boxes also have benefited from more efficient computer chips and other internal components, Turner said.

Horowitz agreed that pay-TV subscribers should replace multiple set-top boxes with DVRs with one set-top box with a DVR. "If you have a DVR on each of your televisions, you have outdated equipment and you are throwing money down the drain," he said. Going down to one set-top box with a DVR could save a person $50 a year in electricity, he said. NCTA, the trade association, said the pay-TV industry is now on its third generation of set-top boxes with improved energy standards. – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

A California lawmaker has introduced legislation that looks to maintain net-neutrality rules recently scuttled by the Federal Communications Commission, setting up a likely showdown with influential internet companies and, if his bill passes, with the Trump administration in court.

Sen. Scott Wiener released the details Tuesday of a plan aiming to maintain a level playing field on the internet. His bill would prohibit internet providers from blocking or slowing data based on its content or from favoring websites or video streams from companies that pay extra. "No one wants broadband providers to decide what websites we're allowed to access," said Wiener, a San Francisco Democrat. "We all want to make that decision for ourselves."

The FCC in December repealed rules enacted during the Obama administration meant to prevent Comcast, AT&T and other broadband companies from exercising more control over what people watch and see over the internet. Some fear that, absent the rules, internet providers could create "fast lanes" and "slow lanes" on the internet to favor their own sites and apps or make it harder for consumers to see content from their competitors. That could limit consumer choice or shut out upstart companies that can't afford to buy access to the fast lane, critics worry.

Wiener's bill would require online data to be treated the same. It also would make it illegal to specify favored content that would not count against a monthly data cap. Internet companies, which argue that net-neutrality rules discourage investment in broadband networks, is likely to mount an aggressive fight against Wiener's bill. "Broadband providers support an open internet with bright line net neutrality rules, but we simply cannot have 50 different state regulations governing our internet - consumers expect and demand a single, consistent, common-sense approach," said Sally Aman, a spokeswoman for USTelecom, an industry group.

Congress should enact bipartisan legislation that spells out the rules for the internet, Aman said. California would likely face a lawsuit if Wiener's bill passes the Legislature and is signed into law. The FCC specifically barred states from enacting their own net-neutrality rules, but Wiener said the

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Editorial: Lamb's moment – The Democrat ran a flawless race that inspired	federal agency lacks that authority and the state has the legal right to protect the interests of consumers in California. "The bill ensures that ISPs like Comcast, AT&T, and Verizon can't use their power over the on-ramps to the internet to interfere with the free markets that depend on the internet," Barbara van Schewick, a Stanford Law School professor and director of the school's Center for Internet and Society, said in a statement. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, signed the first state-level net neutrality law March 5. A more limited Oregon bill, which would only prohibit the state from buying internet service from companies that blocks or prioritizes specific content, is awaiting action by Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, who has said she'll sign it. Governors in five states — Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Montana and Vermont — have signed executive orders related to net-neutrality issues, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. – ***San Francisco Chronicle*** --- No matter who wins, the blockbuster antitrust trial pitting AT&T against the U.S. government will reshape the media landscape. What it won't do is end the upheaval of an industry contending with new competitors and new technologies. Beginning on Monday, AT&T will defend its $85 billion acquisition of Time Warner in federal court. Investors in companies from pay-TV distributors like Verizon and Charter to content creators like Disney and 21st Century Fox to tech firms like Netflix, Amazon and Google should pay close attention. A world in which the deal is approved will look very different from one in which it is not. If AT&T prevails, the media industry will gain another company that combines distribution and content, much like Comcast-NBC. That merger will spur others. With consumers cutting the cord in favor of streaming platforms and advertisers moving off television, most legacy media firms see gaining scale as their only shot against the tech giants. If the government loses its case, they will have a green light to move forward. Indeed, facing a newly powerful rival in a merged AT&T-Time Warner, they will be compelled to. The first action will likely be between Comcast, Fox and Disney. Fox has agreed to sell assets such as its movie studio and Sky satellite TV provider to Disney, and rejected a higher Comcast bid in part over regulatory concerns. Comcast, which has already bid for Sky, will likely make another offer for all of the assets Disney is buying, setting up an ugly fight. Seeing a "vertical integration" of distribution and content approved, Charter and Verizon could also seek to acquire a content creator. Meanwhile, Comcast-NBC, could come under renewed regulatory scrutiny. The government constraints slapped on as a condition of its merger in 2011 expire this September, but if AT&T isn't constrained, why should Comcast be? Yet the major challenges facing the industry won't disappear. "I don't think NBC is any less challenged because Comcast bought it," says Rich Greenfield of BTIG Research. "It's not like Netflix or Google or Facebook have struggled because of the merger." Take the case of Seeso, a streaming service NBC launched in January 2016. NBC executives wanted to take NBC comedies like "The Office" off of Netflix and make it exclusive to the new platform. Netflix responded by raising its fee for "The Office" by tens of millions of dollars on the condition that NBC give it exclusive rights to the show. NBC caved, and, Seeso, which never had enough subscribers to break even, shut down in November 2017. In the world where AT&T wins, the company will reap some benefit from Time Warner's coveted content. But it's hard to imagine that HBO in the hands of AT&T will pose a serious threat to Netflix, for example. A victory by AT&T won't change the dynamics of the media industry but it will give companies more options to deal with the disruption. At least until the government decides to weigh in again. – ***Wall Street Journal*** --- An unusual question has moved to the forefront of Pennsylvania's race for lieutenant governor: Does incumbent Mike Stack live with his ma? In official paperwork he filed to get on the ballot, the Democrat listed his mom's longtime home in Northeast Philly as his primary residence. But that's not true, according to one of the candidates trying to unseat Stack. Democrat Nina Ahmad, a former deputy mayor of Philadelphia, funded a legal challenge this week to remove Stack from the ballot. The suit, which notes that Stack sold his house in Northeast Philly and stays in the Harrisburg-area lieutenant governor's mansion, claims that he falsified his candidate affidavit. "Mike Stack has charged the commonwealth thousands of dollars for hotel rooms during his stays in Philadelphia despite, according to his own nominating petitions, living with his wife at his mother's house," Ahmad said. Marty Marks, a spokesman for Stack, took a similar shot: "This is a nuisance

challenge. It won't go anywhere. It's an example of how Ahmad will use taxpayer dollars in wasteful ways for her own gain."

Marks said state law allows government workers to maintain a legal residence in the city "from which they came and intend to return." There's no doubt Stack hails from Philadelphia, at least: He is a member of one of the city's political dynasties, and represented Northeast Philly in the state Senate for 14 years. – ***Philadelphia Daily News***

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