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March 23, 2016

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Comcast makes push to hire more veterans

Los Angeles Times Time Warner Cable lowers price of Dodgers channel, hoping to end stalemate

Bloomberg Murdoch May Get Boost in Pay-TV Battle With Netflix in Australia

Associated Press Comcast is latest in cable industry to try to attract millennials

Washington Post What happens when a top privacy and security regulator falls for an email scam

Philadelphia Daily News Editorial: Adopt GOP budget to begin fixing state's finances

Wilkes-Barre Times Leader PA Cong. Lou Barletta (R-11th):

Perkasie (Bucks Co.) councilman Matthew Aigeldinger suggested to board members Monday that a borough-developed high-speed Internet service might be what's needed to lure people to the area. "Maybe we can attract some real good high-tech jobs to our town, maybe become the next Silicon Valley," Aigeldinger said.

The idea is in its infancy right now, but Aigeldinger said he hoped the rest of the board would be agreeable to consulting with professionals to further develop a plan. Other council members seemed receptive but no decision was made to move forward. The borough currently offers its own electric and trash removal services.

If the borough ultimately decides on establishing its own ISP, it could face significant pushback from state regulations. In 2004, Gov. Edward G. Rendell signed House Bill 30 which amended parts of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Code regarding municipal broadband. After Jan. 1, 2006, a municipality would have to offer the local private ISP a "right of first refusal" to provide the service.

If the company waives this right, the municipality can proceed with its own service, according to a summary of the law from Kirkpatrick & Lockhart LLP. Verizon currently offers high speed Internet to Perkasie, making it what the law refers to as the "incumbent local exchange carrier" the municipality would have to get the waiver from. – ***Doylestown (Bucks Co.) Intelligencer***

Two Republicans on the Federal Communications Commission told a congressional panel Tuesday the partisan divide at the nation's telecommunications regulatory body is growing.

FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai, a Republican, said at a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing that the number of votes splitting along party lines at the five-member FCC is growing under FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler - and is twice as high as under four prior chairmen. "Proposals from Republican commissioners have been roundly rejected as crossing a 'red line,' even when an identical proposal from a Democratic commissioner is accepted later on," Pai told a U.S. House panel. "Collaboration has fallen by the wayside."

Wheeler has a busy agenda in the final year of the Obama administration and has drawn the ire of some industry groups and Republicans in Congress. He has proposed allowing consumers access to pay TV without renting an expensive set-top cable box. He also has proposed privacy rules that would require Internet service providers to get consent for using consumer data and has unveiled a plan to expand a subsidy for low-income Americans that covers mobile phones to include broadband Internet access.

Kim Hart, a spokeswoman for Wheeler, said the chairman "has tackled complex issues resulting in more competition, strong protections and improved access to networks for consumers. During the first two years of the Chairman's tenure, 88 percent of votes have been unanimous." FCC Commissioner Michael O'Rielly, another Republican, criticized Wheeler for "constantly pushing the envelope into questionable directions, at the expense of collegiality, staff morale and soundness of decisions."

Republican commissioners have ramped up the rhetoric in recent months. After a federal appeals court put on hold two separate FCC decisions, Pai said the FCC "needs to follow the law and return to the tradition of bipartisan, collaborative decision-making." Many Democrats back Wheeler's aggressive agenda. Representative Anna Eshoo, of California, praised Wheeler for his aggressive agenda that "puts the consumer first and strengthens competition."

Representative Greg Walden, an Oregon Republican who chairs the panel that held the hearing, lamented the "sharp divisions" on the FCC, saying the commission should not give "short shrift to collaboration in favor of expediency." At a Senate hearing this month, Wheeler declined to confirm he will step down at the end of the Obama administration, as is customary for the chair of the commission. The Senate has so far declined to reconfirm

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a Democratic commissioner, Jessica Rosenworcel, who was renominated in 2015. – *New York Times*

Idaho state budget writers signed off on a surprise \$8 million request Tuesday from top legislative leaders to pay for a possible settlement over an illegal statewide contract for broadband in public schools. The Joint Finance Appropriations Committee voted 19-1 to approve the request from House Speaker Scott Bedke and Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill. It comes after the state Supreme Court upheld a decision earlier this month that voided the \$60 million contract. “The bulk of what we’re requesting today is for a settlement,” Hill said, adding that any remaining funds could be funneled toward other pending litigation.

A consortium of telephone companies called Syringa Networks sued the state over the broadband contract in 2009, contending that the Idaho Department of Administration illegally handled the contract to install the infrastructure in schools. A district judge ruled in February 2015 that the broadband contract was illegal and violated the state’s procurement laws. Idaho then lost its appeal to the state’s highest court.

Idaho already has agreed to pay around \$1 million for Syringa Networks’ legal fees. The state also has spent nearly another \$1 million on its own failed legal defense. Amid the court battle, officials have been negotiating with the main vendors, Education Networks of America and Qwest, to come up with a fair dollar amount to cover the work the companies did under the contract but were not yet paid for.

The House speaker says the Legislature will likely adjourn over the next few days, and he wants flexibility to settle with the vendors in the interim. “The \$8 million signals nothing,” Bedke told The Associated Press. “But, obviously, we believe (the settlement) is going to happen when we’re not here.”

Bedke and Hill declined to comment further about the progress of the settlement. “In the beginning, we were going to set \$20 million aside,” said Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, co-chairwoman of the powerful budget-setting committee. “There’s still a lot up in the air. I just know it’s reasonable to give the flexibility for what could happen.”

However, Sen. Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow, raised concerns about publicizing how much the state had to pay for a settlement. “We’re putting \$8 million into a pot here,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be wiser to keep our cards close rather than put you guys in a spot where we’re making a commitment?”

The possible settlement funds will be placed in a little-known account called the Legislative Legal Defense Fund, whose expenses are approved by only the House speaker and Senate president pro tem. Since its inception in 2012, the fund has been used to pay for outside legal counsel instead of relying on the attorney general’s office. The fund originally received \$200,000 to split between the House and Senate and an additional \$1 million last year. It’s never been used for settlements or court fees. – *Associated Press*

The 4 percent cable franchise fee Jim Thorpe borough charges Blue Ridge Communications will remain the same during the most recent round of negotiations between the two entities. Thorpe’s borough council recently authorized its solicitor to begin talks with the cable company as the franchise agreement is up for renewal. The money is compensation to the municipality for use of its rights of way and other infrastructure.

The Cable Communication Policy Act of 1984 limited cable franchise fees to a maximum of 5 percent of the cable system’s gross revenues. While discussion on the issue was brief for Jim Thorpe, it did kick around the idea of raising the percentage it collects from 4 to 5. “A lot of the municipalities I am familiar with do charge the 5 percent,” borough manager Maureen Sterner said. “It really doesn’t affect negotiations.”

The move, which was eventually decided against, would have brought an additional \$18,000 per year into borough coffers. "It's kind of a Catch-22 though," said Councilman Jay Miller, "because (Blue Ridge) is most likely going to pass that on to the customers. I think at this time, it's our best bet to stay at the 4 percent." Sterner said the past franchise agreement ran seven years, a contract length she is comfortable with and is hoping for again. – *Lehighon Times News*



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