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Oregon lawmakers scrambled Monday morning to address concerns from Google Fiber that a bill - intended in part to help lure the company's superfast Internet service to the Portland area - would instead keep out the service altogether. State Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, said the current plan is to go ahead and approve Senate Bill 611, which has

been in the works since the start of the Legislative session last month. The bill has language that Google Fiber warned Thursday would exclude it from tax savings intended to bring the company's "gigabit" Internet service to Portland.

After that bill passes - either Monday or Tuesday - lawmakers will use a separate bill to fix the faulty wording. That could happen as early as this week. "The gigabit language is really about a one- or two-word change," said Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, who has shepherded the bill through the Legislature as chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue. Another change Google sought can be accomplished almost as easily, he said.

Legislation on tech taxes has been on a torturous path since October, when the state Supreme Court upheld an unusual provision of Oregon tax law. The law values the property of telecom companies and other tech businesses based on the value of "intangibles," such as their brand, in addition to their physical property. Tech companies testified the thorny tax methodology



more than tripled their property tax bills, warning the state law could scuttle large data

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centers planned for rural Oregon. And public officials said the law and Supreme Court ruling were derailing Google Fiber's plans to serve the Portland area.

But crafting a legislative fix that satisfies both the tech companies and the local governments that depend on property tax revenue has proven difficult. Here's a quick recap:

– After a month of hearings, the state Senate approved SB 611 on March 2. The bill was designed to address the tax issue for data centers, cable TV companies and high-speed Internet services like Google Fiber.

– Oregon cities and counties objected, saying the tax exemptions were too broad. So the state House rewrote the language to narrow the exemptions. A revised SB 611 passed the House on Friday.

– But Google Fiber objected, warning of two problems in the bill: It provides a tax exemption for high-speed Internet services faster than 1 gigabit per second - but Google Fiber promises service only "up to" 1 gigabit; The exemption expires after 20 years. Google wants a longer exemption for an investment likely to run in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

For procedural reasons, it would be difficult for lawmakers to amend SB 611 now this late in the process. So Hass said the most straightforward approach to addressing Google's concerns is to start fresh with another bill. "The House Revenue Committee and I are happy to continue working with Google to try to make sure the definitions and details in SB 611 work for Google and the State of Oregon," Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, chairman of the revenue committee, in an e-mail Monday. "We do have another bill that could be used to make changes that may be appropriate."

Google has kept a low public profile throughout the Legislative session, in contrast to Amazon, CenturyLink and Comcast, which all testified on SB 611. But Thursday's letter to lawmakers from the company makes it clear the company has been actively campaigning for the legislation, working behind the scenes. Given that, it's not clear how communication broke down between the company and lawmakers over language in the bill. Thursday's letter to members of the state House of Representatives went out before Friday afternoon's vote and unambiguously warns that SB 611, as written, would make Google Fiber in Portland "extremely unlikely."

Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton, said the language issues reflect the complexity of the underlying tax issue and the number of parties with a stake in the issue. Read, who serves on the House Revenue committee that worked on SB 611, said each stakeholder sought to fix a separate problem, making the work even more complicated. "It's not possible in the first attempt to get everything completely right," he said. – **Portland Oregonian**

The wait is over — and it wasn't long.

On Monday, two lawsuits were filed against the Federal Communication Commission's new rules for broadband Internet service, the beginning of what is expected to be a flurry of legal challenges to the new regulations. The United States Telecom Association, a trade group that represents some of the nation's largest Internet providers, [filed suit in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit](#). On the same day, Alamo Broadband, a small broadband provider based in Texas, sued in federal court in New Orleans.

The lawsuits came sooner than many experts had expected, months before the rules — voted on last month — are even set to take effect: 60 days after they are eventually published in the Federal Register. Both filings seemed to acknowledge that they were potentially premature, with USTelecom asserting that its filing was "protective," and Alamo calling its own action one taken "in an abundance of caution."

The new rules, released 11 days ago, reclassify broadband Internet providers as common

carriers under Title II of the Communications Act and are aimed at prohibiting service providers from blocking, speeding up or slowing down users' access to certain content. The F.C.C. has said they were necessary to protect an open Internet, a concept often referred to as net neutrality.

Internet providers have argued that the concerns of such activity — prioritizing some content over others — are unfounded. On Monday, Jon Banks, a senior vice president of USTelecom, reiterated that. "We do not block or throttle traffic and FCC rules prohibiting blocking or throttling will not be the focus of our appeal," he said in a statement.

Walter B. McCormick, the president of USTelecom, said the organization's case would center on the choice to reclassify providers under Title II as telecommunications providers, rather than as information services. "We do not believe the Federal Communications Commission's move to utility-style regulation invoking Title II authority is legally sustainable," Mr. McCormick said on Monday. "Our member companies conduct their business in conformance with the open Internet principles." Asked about the two filings, a spokesperson for the F.C.C. said on Monday: "We believe that the petitions for review filed today are premature and subject to dismissal." — **New York Times**

Tweeting and Facebooking with Comcast Corp. will get easier. The cable giant said Monday that it will triple its social-media employees to 60 by this summer as part of its flagging customer-service operations. Social-media employees respond to questions or concerns on Twitter, Facebook, and Comcast support forums. The hiring will be done in Philadelphia and Denver by this summer. "Wherever our customers are asking questions, that's where we want to be," Comcast spokeswoman Kate Finn said.

Comcast has said it will improve customer service and in recent months announced plans to make it easier for customers to return Comcast set-top boxes and other equipment through United Parcel Service, as well as an app that tracks when a technician will arrive for a scheduled appointment. Comcast also says it is upgrading and modernizing hundreds of retail stores to make them more welcoming and reduce wait times. Comcast began its social-media outreach in 2007. — **Philadelphia Inquirer**

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to use an appeal by DirecTV to consider reinforcing companies' ability to take disputes with consumers into arbitration. The justices Monday said they would review a California state court decision allowing former customers to press a class-action lawsuit against DirecTV. The customers claim they were assessed illegal penalties for canceling their satellite-television service early. DirecTV says the lower court ruling flouts a 2011 Supreme Court decision that said companies can use arbitration agreements to block people from pressing legal claims as a group. The 2011 ruling said the Federal Arbitration Act preempts state laws that require class actions to be an option. — **Bloomberg**

The NFL's local television blackout policy has been suspended for the 2015 preseason and regular season, the league announced Monday. None of last season's games were blacked out because of the policy, which requires teams to sell a minimum number of tickets in order to ensure local broadcasts. In 2013, two games were blacked out. The NFL maintains blackouts are needed in order to encourage fans to attend games.

The NFL's blackout policy has been around for decades, but it has come under increasing criticism in recent years. In October, the Federal Communications Commission voted to drop a 40-year-old rule that prohibited cable and satellite TV providers from airing blacked-out games in the home team's market. The NFL is still allowed to enforce its policy that prevents games from being broadcast locally. The decision to suspend the blackout rule was approved by the teams at the league's annual meeting in Phoenix. — **Associated Press**



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