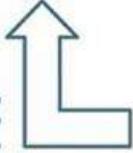


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Pitcairn (Allegheny Co.) officials soon will decide whether they will continue the borough-owned cable and Internet services or move to a larger carrier.

Today, officials are set to meet with an independent consultant at no cost to the borough. Officials met last week with American Cable Association representatives. "We'll see what the prospects are (for keeping the current systems) and if there's anything we've missed," said council President Jack Bova at Monday's meeting. The current contract for the borough-owned services will automatically roll over to a two-year renewal on June 1 if a decision isn't made. "I don't think that the borough has any direct responsibility to provide Internet to anyone," said council Vice President John Prucnal.

Continuing to invest in the borough-owned services will cost Pitcairn \$12,000 per month, in addition to paying \$4,800 per month for upgraded digital equipment. Prucnal said the costs of maintaining and upgrading the system do not make business sense. He said Pitcairn's Internet speeds are approximately a fourth as good as those of a national carrier. "We'd have to increase the rate that people would be paying for a system that isn't that good," he said.

Pitcairn's cable-TV system has 96 channels, seven of which are high-definition, while other providers have "40, 50, 60 high-definition channels," all at a similar price to what Pitcairn cable costs, Prucnal said. "Even if we upgraded (service) still wouldn't be at the same level (as a national carrier)" said Councilwoman Dona Galia. "The idea of us investing more money in this that we don't have ... I don't see how we could in good conscience do that," said Bova. A vote is scheduled for the April 25 meeting. – *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

Last-ditch talks between Verizon and the unions representing 39,000 workers failed Tuesday night, setting up a strike to begin at 6 o'clock Wednesday morning.

Workers from New England to West Virginia, all employed by Verizon Communication Inc.'s landline division, which also handles fiber-optic cable installation, sales, and service, will go off the job. Hundreds are expected to gather in Philadelphia outside Verizon's building at Ninth and Race Streets for a rally at 8 a.m. Wednesday, said union official James Gardler, president of Communications Workers of America Local 13000 in Philadelphia.

On Tuesday afternoon, Verizon said it had been contacted by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and agreed to accept resolution of issues by mediation, if the unions agreed to extend the strike deadline. CWA spokeswoman Candice Johnson disputed that. "Historically, federal mediators only get involved in collective bargaining situations with the agreement of both parties," she said in a statement. "CWA did not authorize anyone at the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to approach Verizon about extending the strike date."

Represented by the CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the employees have been working without a contract since August. "We don't have any comment," IBEW spokesman Mark Brueggjenjohann said.

The strike comes as Verizon is shifting away from its legacy "wired" businesses - the part of the firm that brings telephone and Internet service into homes via copper and fiber, which Verizon markets as FiOS. Most of the company's unionized employees work for the "wired" part of the business, which now drives 29 percent of Verizon's revenues, down from about 37 percent in 2011, when workers went on strike for 10 days, according to company regulatory filings for 2015. The contract was ultimately resolved after federal mediation in 2012.

About 2,100 employees represented by the CWA will be affected in Philadelphia and the surrounding suburbs, part of 5,900 CWA workers striking in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. The IBEW represents 3,900 in New Jersey and about 100 in the Philadelphia area. Verizon, with 2015 profits of \$18.4 billion on \$131.6 billion in revenues, employs 177,700. More than one in five workers is expected to be out on strike.

Cellphones aren't likely to be affected by the strike, although repairs or installation requests for Internet or landlines could be delayed. Verizon said it has been training nonunion workers to take over union functions. "Let's make it clear - we are ready for a strike," Bob Mudge, president of Verizon's wire-line network operations, said in a statement.

In newspaper advertisements, Verizon says it is offering a 6.5 percent increase in wages on a compensation package averaging \$130,000. The advertisement also says the company's proposal will "make changes to legacy constraints in our contracts." "Union leaders need to move out of the past and recognize that is no longer the Ma Bell era of princess phones and phone booths," the advertisement said. Those legacy constraints are at the heart of the disagreement between the two sides.

Gardler said the company wants to have the right to move repair crews from their home base to any location from New England to Virginia for two months at a time, not allowed under the current contract. That's because union crews are stretched thin as Verizon slows its investment in its "wired" business, not replacing workers and requiring those who remain to put in many hours of mandatory overtime weekly, union officials said.

The unions also want Verizon to agree to keep call centers open and not to shift work out of state or out of the country to the Philippines or Mexico. "We don't want calls going to contractors," Gardler said. "If the customer base is in Pennsylvania, people in Pennsylvania should be handling those calls." The antiunion National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is offering free legal help to union members who don't want to strike or who want to resign from their union. – **Philadelphia Inquirer, and from Reuters, 40,000 VZ union employees walked off the job this morning**

Internet and landline issues continue to hinder new Frontier Communications subscribers in Orange County. Former Verizon wireline customers in the region have experienced interrupted FiOS and DSL service since their network provider changed hands April 1, the day the \$8.6 billion deal was finalized. Huntington Beach resident Janet Williams, one of a million new Frontier subscribers in California, was without service for five days.

Williams said her connection problems were fixed after a technician came to her home and replaced a modem, which was not compatible with Frontier's service. She also discovered through her online Frontier account that her bill was higher than it had previously been under Verizon.

Frontier denied any billing changes had taken place or that new hardware was necessary to transition to its service. "Frontier Communications is in the process of completing the transition of over one million voice, video, data and FiOS customers in California to the Frontier network," the company said in an email to the Register. "Despite the size of this transition, we have experienced a small number of requests for assistance from customers in California, and those are being addressed."

The company said credit would be given to some customers experiencing

service issues. Laura Akita, another Huntington Beach resident, was without TV, internet and landline service for a week before deciding to cancel Frontier and switch to Time Warner Cable. "This has been the worst experience that I have had dealing with a service," Akita said. "I am mentally and emotionally drained over this. I have been lied to by each person I spoke with. I should have canceled last week."

A Frontier representative said residential customers who are experiencing outages can call 1-800-921-8101. Business customers should call 1-800-921-8102. The company, based in Connecticut, closed a deal in 2014 to acquire AT&T's wireline, DSL, U-verse video and satellite TV businesses in Connecticut. At the end of 2015, the company had 3.124 million residential customers, 289,200 business customers and 2.462 million broadband subscribers, according to Yahoo Finance. The company was known as Citizens Communications Co. until July 2008, when it changed its name to Frontier Communications. – **Orange County (CA) Register**



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