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Texting, photo sharing and video calling have become staples of everyday personal communication. Now, lawmakers are beginning to explore how these booming technologies will benefit another area of communication: 911 and emergency response.

Technological advancements and increased funding would be in store for county-based 911 operations if a proposal that has cleared the House, and is scheduled for a Senate committee vote today, makes it to Gov. Tom Wolf's desk. Those systems' improvements and new funds would come by way of a proposed increase in fees paid by phone users. Cory Angell, spokesman for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, said one of the goals is to connect all the county dispatch centers through an "Internet protocol" system. This would enable the centers — or Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) — to receive 911 video calls, similar to the technology employed by Skype or Facetime on a smartphone.

Fifteen of the 69 PSAPs across the commonwealth — including the ones in Allegheny and Washington counties — can already receive texts to 911 for AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon users, according to a recently updated map on the PEMA website. One additional county, Warren, can receive AT&T text messages, and six others are in the process of requesting the deployment of text-to-911 services. Jeffrey Yates, Washington County director of public safety, said his county gained the capability to receive 911 texts about three months ago, and has not had many texts come in yet. "There are some specific situations where that's appropriate, but for the most part we really encourage people to call the way they normally would," Mr. Yates said. "It's really a lot more efficient that way."

In a Senate committee hearing last week, PEMA director Richard Flinn spoke of a future

Daily News **A sting case about more than money**	system that would route a 911 call to not only a police officer or an EMS provider, but to a hospital that could respond back to a paramedic with vital information. "In reality, smartphones, computers, tablets, wrist watches, to name just a few of the marvels of technology, are the next generation," Mr. Flinn wrote in submitted testimony. Those new technologies are tantalizing but could also drive up expenses, since it costs more to connect with these new devices, and to identify the location of the devices sending text messages. As for video calls and other experimental 911 technologies, "some people find value in it and some don't," Mr. Yates said But to make these kinds of technological advancements possible, the bill looks to increase monthly phone fees for 911 services. It would be the first across-the-board increase of the fees since the original act was passed in 1990. Current surcharges for emergency calls are $1 a month for wireless phones and Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP) lines, along with a maximum surcharge of $1.50 a month for landline phones, though that charge depends on the size of the county. The surcharges appear on account holders' monthly bills. The new legislation would increase the surcharge to $1.65 and make it uniform for every device that can contact 911. The bill, appropriately named House Bill 911, passed the House in early May by a vote of 134-59. According to the bill, the increased $1.65 fee would bring in more than $300 million, which would cover the 911 systems for the time being. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*** Americans have long expressed dissatisfaction with their cable and Internet service. This year, they seem to have grown even more dissatisfied. The American Customer Satisfaction Index released on Tuesday the results of its latest study on customer satisfaction with cable TV, Internet and phone service providers, saying that the results declined to a seven-year low. Of the 43 industries on which the survey solicits opinions, TV and Internet companies tied for last place in customer satisfaction. Cable TV and Internet providers have faced particular scrutiny in a year filled with talk of mergers in the industry. Regulators' reservations about Comcast $45 billion bid for Time Warner Cable killed the deal. Charter Communications announced deals last week to buy Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks for a total of $67.1 billion. "Internet and TV have always been among the lowest scoring," said David VanAmburg, director of the Index. "But this year they're at the very bottom." The study, which is based on more than 14,000 consumer surveys, gives companies a rating from 0 to 100. For cable TV service, Comcast's rating dropped by 10 percent over last year, for a score of 54, the Index found. Time Warner dropped by 9 points, to a 51, tying Mediacom Communications for the lowest score among the more than 300 companies evaluated by the Index. For Internet service, Time Warner received a more favorable rating than last year, earning a score of 58, compared with 56 for Comcast, 57 for Charter, 68 for Verizon FiOS and 69 for AT&T U-verse. "Customer service in these industries has long been bad," Mr. VanAmburg said of Internet and TV providers. "They don't have a good business model for handling inquiries with efficiency and respect. It goes back a decade plus." Even though those complaints are longstanding, customer frustration has risen along with the ever-rising prices. "You compound all that with the prices customers are paying, and that's the final straw," he said. "They're opening bills each month and saying 'I'm paying how much?'" But in an age of over-the-top viewing options like Hulu and Netflix, customer dissatisfaction may increasingly translate to companies' bottom lines. "There was a time when pay TV could get away with discontented users without being penalized by revenue losses from defecting customers," said Claes Fornell, chairman and founder of the Index. "But those days are over." – ***New York Times***

Europe’s telecommunications companies are on a mission: Build scale before it is too late.

Telecom operators in the region have been on a deals blitz over the past 18 months, with companies in the U.K., France, Spain and elsewhere looking to share the burden of rising costs as revenues slide. Some executives fear that if rivals in one country don’t team up, they risk being swallowed up by bigger peers from abroad. “Consolidation isn’t about a monopoly,” said Patrick Drahi, executive chairman of Altice SA, who added that European companies need to bulk up to stave off foreign takeovers. “It’s not the end of competition.”

Europe’s telecom industry has struggled amid intense competition from low-cost entrants to the market, shifting consumer habits in an Internet age and regulation that has kept pricing low. Feeling the pressure, deal volume in the European telecom sector stands at nearly $67 billion so far this year, the highest level for that period since 2000, according to Dealogic. It has been felt across the region. In the U.K., broadband operator BT Group PLC earlier this year sealed its deal to buy EE, the largest mobile carrier in the country. Hutchison Whampoa Ltd. of Hong Kong agreed to buy mobile operator O2 from Telefónica SA of Spain in deals valued at a total of $32.81 billion.

Last year in France, Vivendi SA sold for $23 billion its mobile and broadband operator SFR to Mr. Drahi’s Altice, the most acquisitive group on the Continent in the past year. Altice is still keen on a purchase of Bouygues SA’s telecom unit, which would shrink the number of mobile carriers in France to three from four. But Bouygues has been adamant that it isn’t for sale. In Italy, Hutchison is in talks with Amsterdam-based telecom company VimpelCom Ltd. about forming a joint venture between their mobile-phone subsidiaries in the country. The parties hope to strike a deal by this summer, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The deal spree highlights the fierce competition in many European markets from newer, low-cost entrants. At the same time, consumers have turned away from mobile services such as voice calling and text messaging to less-costly data-based services, such as Facebook Inc.’s WhatsApp. Revenue from European operators fell 11% to €248 billion ($273 billion) from 2009 to 2015, according to a lobby group, European Telecommunications Network Operators’ Association. While revenue has dropped, operators argue that they face higher costs from investments necessary to cope with the rise in data usage.

With still more than 150 telecom operators, according to KPMG, Europe is one of the world’s most fragmented telecom markets. Much of the consolidation has centered on whittling down the number of telecom companies per country. In individual European markets, there are often four or more competitors. By contrast, in the U.S., there are four telecom operators for the entire country. “We’re nearly in a madhouse here,” said Orange Chief Executive Stéphane Richard. “No economic model can justify having more than two or, maximum three, fixed and mobile infrastructures in big European countries.” Some companies are looking to merge mobile carriers to combine infrastructures. Others are trying to merge fixed with mobile to push “quad play” offers to customers that combine television, broadband, fixed telephony and mobile service in one, a move that allows carriers to hold on better to customers and spend less on acquiring new ones. The logic in both is to save costs and boost profits.

Liberty Global PLC Chairman John Malone has hinted that it could make sense for the cable company to pick up some assets of Vodafone PLC, the Continent’s largest mobile operator. A potential deal would help both companies offer quad-play services. Operators are taking advantage of a regulatory window that appears more merger-friendly. While large mergers were long considered impossible as European authorities pushed for more competition to benefit consumers, the European Commission in recent years has let such deals happen, giving telecom executives the confidence that they can do more. The commission’s new president, Jean-Claude Juncker, and his digital commissioner, Günther Oettinger, have both called for easing restrictions on mergers to boost investment, especially amid global competition. But the commission, the European Union’s executive branch, continues to scrutinize deals in depth and often imposes remedies to make sure competition remains vivid.

In Spain, for example, Orange had to agree to a package of divestments and network-sharing agreements to help launch a new telecom operator to get the green light for its purchase of broadband and mobile operator Jazztel PLC. The nearly $5 billion merger had been closely watched to see how the commission would approach future mergers. "If you consider that it took us nine months after all to get the commission to approve Jazztel, while it took five weeks for U.S. regulators to approve Facebook buying WhatsApp, that is an issue," said Mr. Richard.

In France, Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron said last month that the time wasn't right for consolidation as French operators should think foremost about investing, rather than merging, throwing doubts on whether a deal could happen soon. Against this slow progress, some executives have cast their eyes abroad. A year ago, French telecom billionaire Xavier Niel tried unsuccessfully to buy U.S. operator T-Mobile US for $15 billion in a bid to expand low-cost operator Iliad SA.

Altice, after spending more than $32 billion on acquisitions in the past year, last week made its foray into the U.S. with the purchase of cable company Suddenlink. Mr. Drahi aims to buy more in a market where fewer competitors share a larger pie of revenues. "I think in terms of opportunities which move the needle, the U.S. makes a lot of sense," said a London-based banker at Citigroup Inc. "If you can cut costs in Europe, then you can in the U.S." – ***Wall Street Journal***

You may have noticed that Netflix has been putting bits of promotional material in your programming for its other shows. Sitting down to an episode of "House of Cards," perhaps Netflix has given you a teaser for another original series, Marvel's "Daredevil." It's a small test so far, but it already has some wondering if real, third-party advertising is coming down the pipe.

Netflix chief executive Reed Hastings is trying to shoot down that speculation. In a post on Facebook Monday, Hastings promised that the streaming video service won't be getting ads anytime soon. "No advertising coming onto Netflix. Period," Hastings said. "Just adding relevant cool trailers for other Netflix content you are likely to love." The post comes with a stock image of a dollar sign — an odd choice, if Hastings is saying he isn't making a play for ad money. Still, Hastings appears to have made a popular decision: His post has garnered more than 1,000 likes on Facebook, including from one Mark Zuckerberg. – ***Washington Post***

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