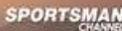
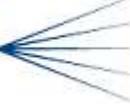


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The home of the future will have high-definition moving picture screens instead of windows, smart beds that track your sleeping patterns, landscape monitoring systems that use weather forecasts to tell you when to water your lawn, and door locks that can be operated with your smartphone.

These technologies were on display Wednesday outside the Ohio Statehouse on a three-story bus that also showcased automotive, health, wearable and city-planning innovations. The visit was part of the Smarter World Tour sponsored by the Ohio Telecom Association and NXP Semiconductors.

More than 170 demonstrations could be seen on the bus, in conjunction with the Ohio Telecom Association's 121st Annual Convention and Tech Show, which has been taking place at the Renaissance Columbus Downtown Hotel since Tuesday and ends today. The association represents traditional phone companies, such as AT&T and Verizon, which now offer broadband services that can make use of these new technologies. "As people are moving through the transition of not having a landline, this is a preview of what all that technology can do," said Charles Moses, president of the association.

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The technologies on display are all part of the "internet of things," a term used to describe devices that automatically connect to the internet over Wi-Fi and with internal sensors. This includes everything from ATM machines to weather monitoring devices to smart watches. It might one day grow to include all of a city's streetlights and vehicles, water and sewer systems, and even bus stops.

"What that could mean is that, say, you're an EMT and there's an emergency. You could communicate with the traffic lights and make sure all of the streetlights are green on a particular street to you can get there faster," said Scott Hughes, a strategic program manager for NXP Semiconductors. "Or on another level, if you're driving somewhere, you can find the fastest route because you'd know where there is construction or an accident or a lot of traffic."

NXP smart boards are inside most technologies that are considered to be part of the "internet of things." "Our technology is embedded in a lot of people's cool stuff, and people don't know we're the reason it's cool," said Hughes, noting that fact is part of the reason for the national tour. City planners, transportation specialists and policymakers were invited to learn about the technology, as was the public.

While some noted it's important to understand the concepts behind these interactive technologies and their capabilities, not everything on the tour bus is ready or reasonable for common use. "Only a small number of things here are practical in our everyday lives. For example, there's a heat-sensing camera, which is cool, but what am I ever going to do with it?" said Casey Ollen, 20, of Dublin.

His father, Carl Ollen, 50, also was at the showcase and found that while some of the sensory home features, like the window-TV screens and the smart bed, were just a luxury, other items on display could be useful. "(Other) stuff, like the cameras to monitor your house or to be able to turn the heat down, that would be nice to have because I'm already doing it by hand," Carl Ollen said. "It would be nice to be able to control that stuff when I'm not at home."

Of course the house of the future comes with a price. Hughes said that while some

devices, such as a lighting system, start at only \$45, others, like a smart ceiling fan, can run up to \$1,500. For those interested in making the switch, he recommends starting with the basics. "If, say, your lights in your kitchen are going out, replace them with smart lights one by one. Then you can slowly build up." – **Columbus (OH) Dispatch**

The Public Utility Commission owes the people of Pennsylvania even greater transparency than is demanded by the Right-to-Know Law. That's what the Office of Open Records said after the PUC reached a \$60,000 settlement with PPL over allegations that the company broke its own rules in restoring power after an October 2011 snowstorm knocked out power to more than 388,000 customers. And that's what the Supreme Court ruled in a 4-2 decision handed down Thursday.

The Public Utility Code, the high court said, includes "a public disclosure law that evinces the General Assembly's desire to effectuate transparency, above and beyond that which is required by the (Right-to-Know Law), in the government's dealings with public utilities." The investigation started over an anonymous tip- believed to have been from a PPL employee -that PPL violated its own policy regarding the prioritizing of power restoration following the October 2011 snowstorm. About 1,300 customers went without power for hours longer than called for by PPL's own policy.

After the settlement was reached, newspaper reporters asked to see the documents that led to the settlement, including the anonymous tip. The PUC at first said the tip was so short as to make it impractical to redact the names of the accuser and the accused. When the Office of Open Records didn't buy that argument, the PUC and PPL shifted their case for nondisclosure when the case went to Commonwealth Court. The new argument was that the only documents that must be disclosed were those considered by PUC commissioners, not those used by the investigators whose work informed their decision. The Commonwealth Court agreed.

At that point, a coalition of 10 news organizations, led by the *Allentown Morning Call* and *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* and including the *Reading Eagle*, appealed to the state Supreme Court. And that court took the side of transparency in no uncertain terms, explaining both that the General Assembly clearly wanted that to be the case, and lawmakers' reasoning for enhanced transparency in such cases. "Governmental transparency is of paramount significance," the court ruled, "when the PUC enters into settlement agreements with public utilities, as such agreements are negotiated behind doors closed to the public."

The case is not about winning one against PPL or the PUC. The PUC's concerns in this case were valid. As the overseer of the state's public utilities, it has an interest in protecting whistleblowers, an interest easily overcome in this case by redacting the tipster's name. And it also wants to be able to encourage utilities to come into line through settlements such as this one- while admitting no wrongdoing, PPL agreed to adopt safeguards against something similar happening again.

The case was about something more important: the public's right to monitor public utilities and the public entity charged with overseeing them. A \$60,000 settlement is significant- as was the loss of power to nearly 400,000 customers that led to it -and the public has a right to see as much of what led to its resolution as possible. The importance of transparency in the oversight of a public resource such as electric power is what this case was about. And the Supreme Court got it right by straightforwardly interpreting the General Assembly's demand for it in the Public Utility Code. – **Reading Eagle editorial**



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