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Pittsburgh Tribune-

High-speed Internet service will be expanded in rural Iowa communities and wireless connectivity will be improved by providing a uniform, statewide framework for locating cellphone towers under a bill signed Monday by Gov. Terry Branstad.

The legislation, known as the "Connecting Iowa Farms, Schools and Communities Act," was a key piece of Branstad's 2015 legislative agenda. The measure, House File 655, had stalled in the Iowa Senate as questions arose over the effectiveness of the

broadband expansion proposal, but it ultimately won approval in both chambers in the final hours of this year's session. Branstad signed the legislation in a ceremony Monday at Van Wall Equipment, a farm implement dealership in Perry. "We know that this will take some time, but we want to move forward as aggressively as we can," Branstad said.

The bill defines broadband service as providing downloads of at least 25 megabits per second, and uploads of at least 3 megabits per second. State officials say about 50 to 60 percent of Iowa currently has access to high-speed Internet service, which is increasingly important to foster the growth of modern agriculture, to connect small businesses to the global marketplace, and to help rural communities and school districts.

The legislation creates a property tax exemption of 100 percent for 10 years for installations of equipment in

a targeted service area. In addition, the measure provides a framework for a grants program for the installation of broadband service in targeted service areas, but there is no state money to fund it. The legislation would allow state, federal or private money to be used for the grants. The granting of property tax exemptions and grants will both "sunset" on July 1, 2020, to permit lawmakers to review the programs.

Branstad proposed similar legislation in 2014, but it failed to win approval. He said Monday he is pleased with the passage of this year's bill and he is confident ways can be

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found to provide sources of money for the grants program. John Teeple, director of technology for John Deere Intelligent Solutions Group, told reporters the legislation will help rural lowans compete in a digital economy. He noted that many Iowa farmers are using advanced precision technology on their equipment to help plant their crops, check the weather and even communicate with farm implement dealers.

The legislation also includes language to create a uniform process for locating new cellphone towers, modifications of existing cell towers, and co-location of cell towers and the rights and responsibilities of local governments/authorities when approving these applications. The legislation would address concerns of wireless companies that want uniformity in the siting process across the state. Local permitting authorities want to make sure to maintain their rights on local zoning decisions, officials said.

According to telecommunications industry officials, Iowa's wireless consumers have been missing out on the connectivity they need as local governments and wireless carriers have struggled with a confusing patchwork system of cell tower siting ordinances, terminology and processes that differ from community to community. The lack of clarity has slowed investment in deployment and construction of wireless infrastructure. As a result, some lowans have left waiting for access to the latest high-speed wireless capabilities and devices, industry officials say. Under the bill, the entire cell tower siting act will sunset after five years. At that point, the permitting and application process will revert to the current system unless action is taken by the Legislature. – *Des Moines Register*

Margaret Redding, 97, who lives in rural Vinton County (Ohio), can't contact the emergency services she needs without a landline. But Gov. John Kasich and Ohio lawmakers want to make it easier for companies to eliminate landlines used by as many as 700,000 Ohioans, like Redding, who don't have access to a cellphone or a broadband network. "I need the landline for emergency situations when my daughter and her husband are at work. I also need the landline to contact my doctors for appointments and for them to contact me, and for me to contact family and friends," Redding wrote in a letter to Ohio lawmakers protesting the change.

About 17.5 percent of Ohioans rely mostly on a landline for their phone calls, and 6.3 percent of residents use them exclusively, according to [the most recent estimates from a National Health Statistics report](#). The proposal would allow phone companies to ax landlines if businesses give customers at least 120 days notice. Kasich proposed the change in the two-year, \$71 billion state budget after threatening to veto a similar idea last fall. Lawmakers are negotiating differences in the budget this week with a deadline of June 30.

Telecommunication companies argue that ditching old technology will free up money to invest in Internet services for more Ohioans. The Ohio Telecom Association, a trade association for 41 telecommunication businesses, supports the proposal, saying it will allow more investment in new technologies. But advocates say eliminating landlines could disconnect low income families and older adults from emergency services, physicians and attorneys they need. "Some customers could be hurt," said Mike Smalz, a senior attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center. "They would either end up with no phone service or unaffordable service or service that doesn't meet their needs."

[Access is a problem in rural, Appalachian counties](#), where 63 percent of households subscribed to home broadband services, compared with 72 percent of households statewide, according to the most recent survey from Connect Ohio, a nonprofit organization focused on improving access to Internet and technology. Individuals could protest the elimination of their landlines with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, saying they couldn't find a reasonable and comparatively priced alternative in the area. If PUCO agrees, they would receive a one-year reprieve, which could be extended. –

Cincinnati Enquirer

Remember last week, when we learned that a San Diego-based company **would be filing a net neutrality complaint** against Time Warner Cable? Well, that complaint just dropped. In a **filing** with the Federal Communications Commission on Monday, Commercial Network Services (CNS) claims that it's being charged unjust rates to deliver its streaming Web cam video to consumers.

CNS wants Time Warner Cable to carry its traffic for free. But TWC is telling CNS's chief executive, Barry Bahrami, that his company doesn't qualify for what's called a "settlement-free" deal. "TWC is acting as gatekeeper and degrading our ability to exercise free expression," Bahrami writes in the complaint. "TWC's management policy is restricting the open exchange of Internet traffic." TWC has said that its behavior is consistent with industry standards and that it's confident the FCC will reject Bahrami's claims.

It's unclear how much traction Bahrami will get with the commission. His argument is that Time Warner Cable has violated the FCC's rules against paid prioritization, or the tactic where Internet providers charge a fee to selectively speed up certain Web sites. That behavior was labeled illegal under the FCC's net neutrality rules. But that part of the FCC's rules only cover the so-called "last mile" between a consumer's device and his Internet provider. It doesn't address the part of the Internet where Time Warner Cable and Bahrami are having their dispute. So the FCC could find that, in fact, TWC hasn't broken any rules after all. – *Washington Post*



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