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Minneapolis Star Tribune
Net-neutrality advocates would let Trump control the Internet

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Seattle Times
Rural internet can help shrink economic gap

Washington Times
Net neutrality process ‘meaningless’ with flood of fake and foreign comments to FCC

Atlantic Broadband’s $1.4 billion purchase of Northeast cable operator MetroCast was a “spectacular operational fit” that will deliver “about as low risk integration as you could possibly have.” So said Atlantic Broadband President and Chief Revenue Officer David Isenberg, who talked to FierceCable via phone from Atlantic Broadband’s Quincy, Massachusetts, headquarters on Thursday, about 10 days after his company and its Canadian parent, Cogeco Communications, announced the acquisition of 236,000 MetroCast residential and business passings in New Hampshire, Maine, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.

Of course, Atlantic Broadband’s $200 million purchase of MetroCast’s Connecticut systems two years ago gave the operator a good idea of what it was getting into. Part of Atlantic Broadband’s confidence, Isenberg said, “comes from the the fact that we’ve done this before. But also it’s because our back-office operations match up so well. We both use CSG International’s billing platform, for example, and we both use Cisco’s DOCSIS platform. We have the same telephony vendor and the same VOD structure.”

The compatibility, Isenberg said, will allow Atlantic Broadband to transition its newly acquired MetroCast systems to its own pricing and branding within as little as two months after the deal closes. When the acquisition does close, Atlantic Broadband will solidify its position as a “midsized” U.S. cable operator, now ranking firmly on a list of top 10 operators, servicing 11 states that span from Maine to Florida. It will pass more than 800,000 homes and service more than 400,000 customers, while employing close to 1,200 workers. Combined annual revenue is expected to surpass $700 million.

The MetroCast deal, Isenberg explained, offers parent Cogeco a means of growth. One-quarter of the Montreal-based operator’s footprint has access to fiber-to-the-home, while another 25% has access to “fiber-to-the-node” services. Amid the competitive landscape, Cogeco has been growing annual revenue at only around 3%. Atlantic Broadband has been growing revenue at about a 6% clip, Isenberg said. “About 70% of our footprint is still DSL,” he said. “For MetroCast, about 90% of their footprint is DSL services.”

Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel
Net neutrality legislation needed to foster innovation

San Jose (CA) Mercury News
Editorial: Tech must go all out to retain net neutrality

pennlive.com
Plan B revenue package hits wall in Pa. House; Speaker Turzai challenges Senate, governor to lead

Philadelphia Inquirer
Pa. House Speaker Mike Turzai's big budget gamble

For its newly acquired customers, Isenberg said Atlantic Broadband will follow the same integration path it used to convert MetroCast's Connecticut customers two years ago: increase broadband speeds and deliver upgraded, next-generation TiVo-powered TV experiences, all with the aim of upping the level of double- and triple-play customers. "Their flagship speed when we acquired the Connecticut system in 2014 was 25 Mbps, with a top speed of 75 Mbps," Isenberg said. "Now our most popular speed is 100 Mbps with a top speed of 1 gig. From a TV perspective, they don't have an advanced DVR platform like TiVo or X1. Their platform is based on a Rovi guide, which is a serviceable but basic guide, and does not deliver the advanced capabilities today's customer is looking for."

The competitive outlook for pay-TV services in the Metrocast footprint is big, Isenberg explained. Around 82% of homes in that footprint subscribe to a traditional pay-TV service, but MetroCast only delivers video services to about 32% of available homes.

Only around 5% of the footprint has access to Verizon FTTH service, meaning much of the market is using satellite TV services that are highly vulnerable to Atlantic Broadband's bundled offerings of high-speed internet and advanced TiVo-based video service. "We're focused on multiproduct triple- and double-play sales," Isenberg said. "Our aim is to get the majority of our user base into triple-play bundles." He added that about 45% of the MetroCast customer base is multiplay. "For Atlantic Broadband, that number is 55%," he added. "So there's a full 10 percentage points of difference between the two of us. … We believe that having a strong video product is an important growth driver."

When it was suggested that Atlantic Broadband's video strategy contrasts sharply with the more nihilistic perspectives of other midsized cable operators, notably Cable One, Isenberg noted, "The name of the game on every sales interaction is, 'how do I take an internet sale that might be a $50 transaction, and turn that into a $150 sale by packaging other services?' We're able to do that more of the time than Cable One." – ***Fierce Cable***

Thanks to last year's state budget, you're paying more to watch House of Cards. This year, The Walking Dead—and a host of other cable TV shows—could cost you more, too.

Just one year ago, lawmakers passed an unpaid-for state spending plan, which Gov. Wolf let become law. To fill the gap, they all agreed to a $650 million tax increase that hiked prices on Netflix, cigarettes, and vaping products. In a case of disturbing déjà vu, Wolf let yet another unfunded spending plan become law recently. This time, lawmakers are eyeing a tax on basic cable — along with a tax on home heating bills, a tax on bar drinks, and another tax on gas drillers — to fill the gap.

But tax increases — called "recurring revenues "— have consistently failed to balance Pennsylvania's budget. In the last eight years, lawmakers have raised taxes four times to the tune of $4 billion — including a $727 million increase in 2009; a $250 million natural gas impact tax in 2012; an increase in the gasoline tax and motorist fees and fines in 2013, amounting to $2.3 billion when fully implemented; and a $650 million tax package last year that included the Netflix tax as well as the infamous vape tax that forced nearly 100 vape shop owners out of business.

We can't keep repeating the same failed mistakes of past. The real solution is shrouded in shadows — or in the shadow budget, to be exact. The latest $32 billion spending plan represents just 40 percent of total state spending. An astounding 60 percent of state government's costs are "off book" in a largely unknown and rarely scrutinized shadow budget.

This budget includes more than 150 "special funds" that are often on autopilot, increasing each year without review. Funds like the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Fund, and the Race Horse Development Fund, which alone costs $250 million.

Yet, instead of prioritizing shadow budget spending, some argue Pennsylvanians deserve another tax hike. This despite the fact that Pennsylvanians already bear the 15th-highest state and local tax burden in the nation, at $4,589 per person or more than $18,000 per family of four. Our state's tax burden has already driven thousands to seek better opportunity elsewhere. From July 2015 to July 2016, Pennsylvania's total population fell for the first time in 31 years, dropping by more than 7,600. Meanwhile, many states experiencing population growth—such as Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Nevada, and Idaho—have lower tax burdens.

A new tax on basic cable would hardly make our state more attractive to families. The drumbeat is also intensifying for a natural gas severance tax, purportedly to make drilling corporations pay their "fair share." Yet the existing tax on gas drillers — called an impact fee — is equal to a 6.9 percent severance tax, according to the Independent Fiscal Office. That is higher than the lifetime effective tax rate in any other state.

Drillers shoulder this tax on top of taxes paid by every other business in the state. If we truly wanted to "be like other gas producing states" we would use a severance tax to eliminate our state income tax or our corporate tax. What's more, the true cost of a severance tax would be borne not by corporations but by Pennsylvanians who experience lower wages, fewer job opportunities, and even layoffs — further contributing to our state's population decline.

Lawmakers must recognize that taxing The Walking Dead isn't the answer. Instead, redirecting shadow-budget spending, implementing transformative human services reforms, and getting government out of the booze business would deliver both short- and long-term, non-tax budget solutions. Pennsylvanians don't deserve the bill for Harrisburg's reckless spending. They deserve a government that protects — not plunders — their family budgets. – ***Bradford Era* op-ed**

A House Republican effort to plug a $2 billion hole in the state budget without raising taxes stalled after a lengthy closed-door GOP caucus Saturday, leaving the Pennsylvania Legislature no closer to fully funding the spending plan it passed earlier this month.

House Speaker Mike Turzai, R-Allegheny, sent lawmakers home in late afternoon without movement on a proposal to combine $1.5 billion in borrowing with hundreds of millions drawn from off-budget programs, an approach designed to avoid imposing higher taxes. Turzai told reporters afterward that his members had rejected "in significant fashion" a plan to leverage annual payments from a 1998 multi-state settlement with tobacco companies to borrow enough money to cover a massive deficit in state finances. "Our caucus had a robust discussion," Turzai said. "Securitization is not something our caucus wants to do."

He said House GOP members did not want to "bail out" the Senate or Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf. Some Republican members wanted a severance tax on Marcellus Shale natural gas production, or other forms of revenue that will be available in future years, said Rep. Gene DiGirolamo, R-Bucks, a centrist from the Philadelphia suburbs. "I think we still need some recurring revenue to come into the budget," DiGirolamo said.

Senate Republican spokesman Drew Crompton said the GOP-majority chamber will return to session in the coming week to work on a funding plan, as well as other elements in the $32 billion budget package that have not been completed. "Our members, we've heard them loud and clear over the past two weeks, they want to do something responsible," Crompton said. He said he has doubts that House Republicans are seeking consensus. "We can only play with people who want to play with us," Crompton said. Turzai said it was up to the Senate to send over a tax bill, raising the prospect that his anti-tax caucus may eventually have to decide whether to permit a floor vote on a revenue bill that many of its members would oppose. "We're ready to listen," Turzai said.

House Minority Leader Frank Dermody, D-Allegheny, urged GOP members to have "courage and the wherewithal to step and vote for the money," restarting talks about how to pay for spending that most of them supported. If the stalemate continues, it could drive the state's poor credit rating even lower, and Wolf may have to freeze programs later in the year. Wolf let the spending part of the budget take effect nearly two weeks ago without his signature.

The governor has said he could support borrowing — if it is accompanied by enough recurring tax revenue to put the state on a path to fiscal solvency. His spokesman said after the session ended Saturday that Wolf was eager to resume bipartisan talks on balancing the budget.

Borrowing that is leveraged with money from the tobacco settlement will add costs of its own and, depending how it is structured, could create shortfalls in government programs the tobacco money currently funds. Those programs include anti-smoking efforts, health research subsidies, hospital care for the uninsured, and nursing, home health and medical care for the elderly, poor and disabled. Alternative proposals have been floated to raise taxes on electric and natural gas utility bills, telephone services and cable bills.

The budget stalemate has also stalled nearly $600 million in state support for the University of Pittsburgh and Penn State, Temple and Lincoln universities, as well as the University of Pennsylvania's veterinary school. House members were told to be available to return to the Capitol on six hours' notice. – ***Allentown Morning Call***