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August 11, 2015

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A campaign to bring Verizon FiOS to underserved parts of Pennsylvania is kicking off in the Lehigh Valley.

Pennsylvania Working Families and Communications Workers of America said Monday they will hold a town hall meeting at 4 p.m. Tuesday at the Lehigh Valley Labor Council on Airport Road in Hanover Township, Lehigh County. The meeting, with the theme of Where's Our FiOS?, will focus on how residents can tell Verizon to expand its high-speed, fiber-optic service.



The groups claim Verizon is failing to meet its obligations under the Pennsylvania Utility Code to maintain safe, adequate and reliable service, particularly in rural and underserved urban and suburban areas. Pennsylvania Working Families spokeswoman Amy Fetherolf said the campaign will ramp up over the next few weeks and will include Allentown, Bethlehem and Reading. The group

also launched a website Monday and advertisements are slated to hit Lehigh Valley radio stations Tuesday. "We think it's a really good example of a community that has been getting the shaft from Verizon," Fetherolf said of why the Lehigh Valley was chosen for the campaign.

In December, Verizon spokesman Lee Gierczynski said about 35,000 of nearly 46,000 Allentown households are hooked up to FiOS. He did not provide a new number Monday but said it's "probably more by now." Gierczynski said Allentown is the only Lehigh Valley community where FiOS is offered at this time. He added that Verizon has more than 340 franchise agreements with municipalities in Pennsylvania, and the company is

[AG Kathleen Kane fights charges and public perception under pressure to resign](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer Rendell joins McGinty's Senate campaign as chairman](#)

focused on meeting those obligations before looking to expand.

The campaign from Pennsylvania Working Families and Communications Workers of America also coincides with Verizon's [ongoing labor negotiations with unions](#). The contract covering about [39,000 workers represented by the CWA](#) and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers expired Aug. 1, and employees have been working without a new deal. There are at least 500 Verizon union workers in the Lehigh Valley and Berks County affected by the decision.

So, in terms of the Pennsylvania Working Families and CWA campaign, Gierczynski called the effort "nothing more than a tactic" to distract attention away from issues that need to be discussed at the bargaining table, such as health care costs, pensions and workplace flexibility. – *Allentown Morning Call*

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AT&T said it will now offer a live-streaming version of the DirecTV NFL Sunday Ticket programming package to residents of apartments, condominiums and other buildings that render them unable to install a DirecTV satellite dish. Those who live in houses that are, say, blocked from the southern sky by large trees, billboards and skyscrapers are also eligible for the new live-streaming service.

Live streaming Sunday Ticket packages start at \$50 a month for four months and are accessible via computers, tablets, smartphones or connected devices (Xbox One/Xbox 360, Windows 10, Sony PS3/PS4, Roku and Chromecast). DirecTV has been experimenting with live streaming of the Sunday Ticket games package for several years, offering it to select college campuses. The package is now available to any active student at a four-year university in the U.S. at a promotional rate of \$25 for four months.

NFL Sunday Ticket delivers a live broadcast feed of every out-of-market NFL game every Sunday during pro football's regular season. DirecTV re-upped its program licensing deal with NFL a year ago this month, increasing its average annual payout to the league from around \$1 billion a season to nearly \$1.4 billion. In the context of that significant cost increase, it makes sense that DirecTV is working to offer the service to homes that can't get its core satellite service.

"Millions of people in apartments and houses in the U.S. who were unable to install DirecTV satellite dishes can now enjoy every out-of-market game, every Sunday afternoon on their favorite mobile and connected devices," said Alex Kaplan, senior VP, marketing for DirecTV. "More NFL fans than ever before will be able to access NFL Sunday Ticket TV service and follow their favorite teams and players." – *Fierce Cable*

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Google is learning the ABCs of conglomerate life. The \$444 billion web-search goliath is separating its driverless cars, balloon-powered internet, biotech ventures and the like from its main ad businesses under a new Berkshire Hathaway-like structure called Alphabet. The move suggests Google recognizes how its sprawl has spelled trouble.

Outside perceptions began to change four years ago. That's when Google expanded from smartphone software into hardware with its \$12.5 billion acquisition of Motorola Mobility, its largest-ever acquisition. The deal attracted the attention of U.S. and European trustbusters, who worried about how a more dominant Google might use the thousands of patents it bought. Wall Street began trotting out sum-of-the-parts analyses, as sure a sign as any of the harms of diversification.

Google later sold the handset-manufacturing arm to Lenovo, but it also has spread itself vastly into myriad new areas since then. It is producing Nest thermostats, hunting for ways to prolong human life at Calico, testing drone delivery in its X lab and investing in many new developments by way of its Venture and Capital arms. In the process, Google co-founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page have created a less value-seeking but more technology-powered version of Warren Buffett's variegated enterprise.

Worries about just how much all this mad science might be costing have grown, especially with Facebook's increasing strength as an online advertising competitor. The social network fetches a valuation of 34 times next year's earnings, according to Thomson Reuters data, compared to Google's multiple of 19 times.

The creation of Alphabet – so whimsically named in part to signify Google's bet on alpha, or investment returns above a benchmark – should help. Though it's hard to discern the need for the complex machinations of a holding company and the accompanying one-for-one exchange of Google shares into Alphabet ones, breaking out financial information for the various adventuresome pieces will help investors see at least a bit more clearly how they stack up against the primary operations in search, maps, YouTube, Chrome and Android.

It probably won't be enough to justify housing the whole hodgepodge under one Silicon Valley roof, but may help erase some of Google's conglomerate discount. – *Reuters*; more in [\*New York Times\*](#) and [\*Christian Science Monitor\*](#)



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