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In this issue ... from Florida to California, the push is on for more market-oriented approach to regulation. In DC, the battle over access to networks continues at the FCC as telecoms ask regulators to require SBC and Verizon to continue opening their networks. Some commentators push for a "nonpartisan FCC" while Chairman Powell plugs TV through high-speed Internet lines. Here in Pennsylvania, The Doylestown Intelligencer looks at the "high-tech" explosion in telecom and Chambersburg officials consider offering broadband over its power lines. Verizon continues to invest in more broadband access and the Senate Communications and Technology committee convenes a hearing on VoIP. Finally, insiders are still wondering about Gov. Rendell's pick for the PUC.

From The Papers

A new national advocacy group co-headed by a Florida Public Service commissioner is calling for a fresh, market-oriented approach to utility regulation.

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In California, state PUC to vote on how much SBC can charge rivals like AT&T and MCI for access to its network.

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In Doylestown: "The promise of telecommunications industry deregulation, and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that spawned it, has always been that competition would eventually lead to better, cheaper services," reports The Intel.

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A New York consultant recommends that Chambersburg "further explore the idea of using its electric distribution system to provide high-speed Internet service."

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Thirty seven telecommunications companies have asked the FCC to require SBC Communications Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc. to continue opening their networks to competitors under disputed regulations

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All VoIP all the time, reports ABC.

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New report shows that Indiana is lagging in broadband.

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Broadband needs a nonpartisan FCC.

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Reuters: "FCC chief pushes TV via high-speed Internet lines."

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Keep VoIP Regulations at a Minimum, Committee Members Told (Chapter 30 Talks Move Forward)

Telecommunications experts told a Pennsylvania Senate panel last week that any regulatory scheme targeted at voice-over-the-Internet technology (VoIP) should be minimal, and that it should be crafted on the federal and not the state level.

“They [committee members] got the same message, even from marketplace competitors,” a lobbyist for one of the incumbent carriers said. “Don’t be the first state to regulate VoIP. It’s emerging very rapidly and any government involvement at this point would unnecessarily interfere in its progress.”

The Senate Communications and Technology committee held the one-day hearing as part of a larger attempt to put its arms around the role of government in the volatile telecommunications industry. Chairman of the Committee Jake Corman, R-Centre has taken the lead in negotiations surrounding broadband deployment legislation, HB 30, awaiting action in the Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee, which has become the focal point a number of controversial issues surrounding competition in the telecommunications industry. VoIP has been drawn into the debate.

One of the earlier stumbling blocks over Senate approval of HB 30, which the House approved nearly a year ago, revolves around access to local networks that many VoIP calls require even though they are Internet driven. Verizon and other incumbent carriers insist that competitive carriers, the CLECs, pay for local access as they would any other call. Negotiators close to the talks now indicate that they are close to resolving the VoIP access issue, and other points of dispute that have stymied movement of the legislation.

Among other things, the bill will give incumbent carriers financial incentives to deploy broadband in their service areas before the 2014 deadline outlined in the original Chapter 30 legislation, which was approved by the General Assembly in 1993. A Senate vote on the legislation is now expected after the November 2 elections, but before the 2003-04 legislative session ends on November 30.

PUC Nominee Still a Mystery

Governor Rendell's choice for PUC commissioner is no more certain now than six months ago when a spot became open with the end of Chairman Terry Fitzpatrick's term, according to utility lobbyists who closely follow PUC activity. "There have been a bunch of names floating around," said one utility lobbyist. But no one name looms larger than the other."

One thing lobbyists and other Commission observers are confident of is that the Governor will appoint a Democrat to the PUC. Four Republicans and one Democrat currently make up the Commission. Democrats leaders, observers say, would explode if the Governor chose a Republican. Fitzpatrick still serves on the Commission under a clause in the PUC statute that allows a commissioner to remain for six months after his term has expired, or until a replacement is named. That six month period ends on September 30.

FCC Considers Reducing the Time Interval for Number Porting Between Wireline and Wireless Carriers

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) today asked for comment on a proposal by the North American Numbering Council (NANC), the FCC's advisory committee on numbering issues, for reducing the time interval for porting numbers between wireline and wireless carriers, or intermodal porting. The NANC proposes to reduce the intermodal porting interval by almost 45 percent, from 96 hours to 53 hours.

The Notice also seeks comment on alternative mechanisms for reducing the intermodal porting interval, and on whether certain classes of carriers, including small and rural carriers, should be exempt from any requirement to provide a shorter porting interval. Additionally, the Notice seeks comment on related implementation issues.

Verizon Again Increases Available Internet Access

More consumers and businesses in three Berks County towns can enjoy the benefits of high-speed Internet access now that Verizon Online has expanded its availability in the area. Verizon Online DSL is now available on approximately 4,700 additional lines in Womelsdorf, Hamburg and Fleetwood as the result of the company's most recent expansion and upgrade of its local telecommunications network.

Currently, Verizon Online is offering its basic consumer DSL service for \$29.95 per month when purchased in combination with Verizon Freedom or another Verizon local or long-distance bundle. This service offers a maximum connection speed of 1.5 Mbps (megabits per second) downstream and 384 Kbps (kilobits per second) upstream.

Verizon has invested \$8.5 billion in its network across the Commonwealth over the last 10 years. DSL subscribers can have news in an instant, share digital photos, quickly send e-mail attachments, download movies and play interactive multi-media games in real time. DSL-powered businesses can increase productivity by spending less time doing research, paying bills online and e-mailing orders to suppliers.

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