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USA Today
Sanders, Verizon CEO spar over striking workers

Centre Daily Times (State College)
GOP delegates in Pennsylvania primary often are pledged only to themselves

Allentown Morning Call
White House blasts Pat Toomey for opposing SCOTUS hearing

Associated Press
State of the Race: Campaign for Pennsylvania US Senate seat

President Obama will announce on Friday his support for opening the market for cable set-top boxes, singling out the devices in millions of homes as a clunky and outdated symbol of corporate power over consumers as he introduces a broad federal effort to increase competition.

In an unusual step, Mr. Obama will weigh in personally on a pending proposal at the Federal Communications Commission, filing comments that encourage it to loosen cable companies' grip on the boxes. And he will sign an executive order calling on every federal agency to send him proposals within 60 days for steps they can take to promote competition in a range of industries and better protect consumers.

The F.C.C. proposal would allow subscribers to choose and purchase the devices they use to view television programming, instead of leasing the boxes from their cable companies at an average annual cost of \$231. The F.C.C. approved the proposal in February, starting a 60-day comment period that will soon close. "This just seemed like a clear-cut case where you could get a win for consumers and a win for innovation," said Jason Furman, the chairman of Mr. Obama's Council of Economic Advisers. The president, he added, wanted to use the set-top box issue "as an example to lend greater lift" to his push to get federal agencies to propose new rules to create more competition in their areas.

The announcements represent the latest moves by Mr. Obama to push back against the forces of consolidation and monopoly and to shift power away from large corporations in an array of industries. The president's aides gave no examples of the kinds of rules Mr. Obama would like to see agencies propose in response to the executive order. Mr. Furman said White House officials had already notified the agencies of the coming call for recommendations, so some of the regulations were already underway. Among the supporters of the set-top box proposal are technology giants like Google, Amazon and Apple, which are eager to establish a broader foothold in the TV market. The cable industry is opposed, calling it a giveaway to wealthy tech companies.

In a blog post, Mr. Furman and Jeffrey D. Zients, the director of the National Economic Council, called the set-top box rule the "mascot" for Mr. Obama's new pro-competition executive order. They compared the devices to the bare-bones telephones that consumers once had to rent from telephone companies as a condition of service and noted that when the F.C.C. moved in the 1980s to open the industry to competition, the price, styles and functionality of telephones improved. "Instead of spending nearly \$1,000 over four years on a set of behind-the-times boxes, American families will have options to own a device for much less money that will integrate everything they want — including their cable or satellite content, as well as online streaming apps — in one, easier-to-use gadget," Mr. Furman and Mr. Zients wrote.

The push to be announced on Friday is in line with Mr. Obama's promise in his State of the Union address this year to find ways to help workers, small businesses and entrepreneurs. In a report issued on Friday, the Council of Economic Advisers said that competition was declining in many industries and argued that the decrease was having a detrimental effect on consumers and workers. Mr. Obama has acted several times to combat the trend, including signing legislation to unlock cellphones, which allows consumers to switch providers while keeping the same device.

The Department of Transportation has pressed airports to open slots to more airlines, while the F.C.C. adopted rules for auctioning wireless spectrum intended to allow smaller players more opportunities to participate. The president weighed in personally in 2014 on the F.C.C.'s net neutrality rules. He argued that the Internet should be regulated as a public utility, and he pressed for strict rules to prevent broadband companies from blocking or intentionally slowing legal content and from allowing content providers to pay for a fast lane to reach consumers. The rules were released last year.

The report released on Friday listed several areas that the president's advisers believe

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could be ripe for pro-competition regulations, including so-called Big Data, the consumer information that includes purchasing habits and Internet browsing histories; price transparency; and common ownership of stock by large institutional investors. – **New York Times**

Only six spaced strikers at one time can picket outside the entrances to Verizon offices and they can't block company managers from doing their jobs, according to an injunction signed Thursday in the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia. A union official said the injunction extends throughout Pennsylvania. "We came to an agreement on how we will conduct the picketing for the length of the strike," said Edward Mooney, CWA district vice president in Philadelphia.

Verizon spokesman Richard Young said that the strikers had been standing arm-in-arm. "We need to serve our customers and we can't do that if our managers can't get to work." Verizon also obtained an injunction in Delaware, Young said. About 39,000 unionized Verizon workers went on strike early Wednesday morning after months of failed negotiations to reach a new contract. Strikers include those who are members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The unions and the company have not come to terms on job security and pension provisions in a new contract. There were no talks Thursday, and none scheduled, the union and the company said. – **philly.com**

Rural wireless and broadband providers urged Montana lawmakers Thursday to address the needs of far-flung communities in obtaining quality phone service and faster internet service. Industry representatives visited the state Capitol to tell members of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee about the challenges faced by rural communications companies in providing service to some of the most sparsely populated areas of the state.

The high price of erecting new cell towers and laying miles of fiber optic lines is cost prohibitive, said Mike Kilgore, the CEO of Nemont, which serves about 14,000 wireless telephone and broadband customers across 15,000 square miles in northeast Montana. The area doesn't have the customer base to absorb the cost of expanding infrastructure, he said. "We need a discussion about the challenges these companies face," said Geoff Feiss of the Montana Telecommunications Association, which represents nine rural communications carriers serving about a 100,000 homes across rural Montana. Among those challenges is having enough funding for upgrading phone and broadband networks.

The Public Service Commission is looking into establishing a state universal service fund to build broadband services across rural Montana, said Eric Sell, the commission's spokesman. The fund could be used to augment a similar federal program, which provides about \$95 million to communications providers to help subsidize their costs to expand into rural areas. Last year, the Legislature defeated a \$15 million financing plan to expand internet, phone and cable services in some of the state's most isolated reaches.

In some parts of Montana, the only way to connect to the internet is through antiquated dial-up modems, said Michael Candelaria, the general manager of Mid-Rivers Communications in Circle. Candelaria said it could cost about \$300 million to install 20,000 miles of fiber optics to fully wire the company's service area — money that he says his company does not have.

Kilgore and Candelaria appeared before the legislative committee to speak specifically about cellular service in the state's rural areas, but that discussion, they said, is part of a broader one about connecting the state's most isolated residents to communications services. Wireless and broadband services have become ubiquitous features of American life, but many parts of rural America still struggle to obtain quality phone and

internet service.

Schools and businesses have become reliant on such services, and there has been a national push to improve service into rural areas. Montana has among the slowest broadband access speeds in the country, much of it blamed on limited communications infrastructure. – **Associated Press**

Al Jazeera America went dark on Tuesday at 9 p.m. Many of the out-of-work staffers convened at Studio 450 in Hell's Kitchen for a party that lasted well into the night. The boozy send off stood in stark contrast to the no-alcohol policy of Al Jazeera's owners. One insider recalled being at a board meeting dinner where the owners were uncomfortable that they were in a private room where there were bottles of wine out in the open. "They sat as far away from the dreaded grapes as possible," said the source. – **New York Post**



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