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Almost 33 years ago, I authored legislation that established the “Moore Universal Service Act.” The bill created the California LifeLine Program to ensure that all Californians would have access to telephone service.

At the time the law was enacted, traditional landline phone service was the only option for residential consumers. But with the advent of iPhones, Skype and other technology, how we communicate is changing dramatically.

Yet the state’s Universal Service and communications policy hasn’t kept up with the telecom revolution. It remains focused on traditional landline phone service. It has left the poor, seniors, those with disabilities and rural citizens on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Nearly one in seven Californians doesn’t use the Internet. These are the people who are being failed by traditional Universal Service. Why

doesn’t California help hearing- and vision-impaired people purchase Internet Protocol-enabled smartphones, tablets and other devices? Because the state’s program for people with disabilities requires using outdated devices and technology that can’t access the Internet.

Why can’t low income consumers use Lifeline subsidies to pay for broadband or voice-over-the-Internet? Because California has not advanced policy changes to keep up with technology, it is virtually a “phones only” program that largely ignores the existence of the Internet. In 1983, when we first took the then audacious step of declaring that

differ for different Facebook users, the *Journal* created two news feeds, one 'blue,' the other 'red.'

[pennlive.com Editorial: Ballot question votes exposed a flaw in our electoral system that we need to fix](#)

everyone from all walks of life should have equal access to technology, traditional telephones were dominant. That's why Universal Service started out phone-centric. Why, three decades later, hasn't that changed?

More than 85 percent of California traditional telephone lines have disappeared in favor of smartphones, voice-over-Internet and broadband. We need to get serious about expanding digital opportunity. Access to "plain old telephone service" isn't enough. The next obvious step in improving access for all Californians is to assist all consumers in moving from outdated telephone service to Internet-enabled technology.

Assembly Bill 2395 authored by Assemblyman Evan Low, D-Campbell, establishes a plan to do just that. The legislation contains state-level customer education, voice service, backup power and 911 requirements. These are in addition to protections at the federal level that will address access for people with disabilities, 911 and reliability.

While there were initial concerns that some consumers might be left without choices, the latest version of the bill ensures that no consumer – rural or urban – will lose access to a traditional landline until he or she gets access to newer technology.

It's time for the Legislature to swiftly pass AB 2395 and the Public Utilities Commission to modernize Universal Service. Now is the time to move forward and tackle one of the most important challenges of the day: putting new technology into the hands of those who – without taking steps to update state policy – will continue to be denied access to the life-changing technological advances that exist in today's communications marketplace. – **Op-ed from [former California State Rep.. Gwen Moore](#), who chaired the Utilities and Commerce Committee, in the *Sacramento (CA) Bee***

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FCC commissioners on Tuesday showed sharp divisions over a controversial proposal to open up the cable and satellite set-top box to competition.

Speaking on a panel at INTX, formerly known as the Cable Show, the two Republicans on the FCC, Ajit Pai and Michael O'Rielly, not only characterized the proposal as regulatory folly, but also criticized the current process in which it is up for public review. The proposal would establish an open platform so manufacturers could create their own set-top box -- a move that FCC chairman Tom Wheeler says would allow consumers to buy their device rather than rent it from the cable provider.

But critics question why such a mandate is needed at a time when multichannel providers and content providers are moving to apps and on-screen guidance. "Why the FCC would choose, with all the other issues on its plate...to focus on something that is increasingly fading in the background is beyond me," Pai said. He said that although the FCC is currently in a comment period in which anyone can weigh in on the proposal, he said that the process was more of a "dictation" than a conversation.

O'Rielly said that the FCC should have instead sent out a notice of inquiry over the set-top box market rather than an actual proposal. "I would take the current proposal and throw it in the garbage. That is where it belongs," he said.

Jessica Rosenworcel and Mignon Clyburn, who voted with Wheeler in February to put the proposal up for public review, defended the process. Clyburn said that it is "healthy to have these conversations" about the direction of the industry. "If you do not agree with the original premise, you have an opportunity to weigh in," she said.

Rosenworcel noted that it is by congressional mandate to promote competition in the market for set-top boxes. "My mind is open," she said, adding that "this is a market that could use competition, but we also have a proposal before us that is very complicated."

On Monday, in opening remarks at INTX in Boston, National Cable and Telecommunications Assn. CEO Michael Powell bashed what he called the FCC's "relentless regulatory assault" on the industry. The set-top box proposal is the latest

controversial proposal that has drawn the ire of the industry, along with groups like the MPAA and SAG-AFTRA that have warned of its consequences for protecting copyright. Wheeler will address the conference on Wednesday.

He said in an interview earlier this year that "all we are saying is, 'Cable operators, you can go ahead and control your product. But have an open platform so that anyone can build a device, and then let's compete on who can offer the better device.'" – **Variety**

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Verizon Communications Inc. and representatives from two striking unions will continue contract discussions in Washington this week with the help of the U.S. Department of Labor, the regulator said. The groups during these talks will not make any public statements, nor will there be comments from the federal officials involved, the Labor department said on Tuesday.

About 40,000 network technicians and customer service representatives in the company's Fios Internet, telephone and television services unit walked off the job in mid-April in the largest U.S. strike in recent years. The action was called by the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Sticking points in contract negotiations had included offshoring call-center jobs, pensions and healthcare coverage. "I'm encouraged by the parties' continued commitment to remain at the bargaining table and work toward a resolution," U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez said on Tuesday. "We will continue to facilitate conversations to help the unions and the company reach an agreement," he added. The company and the unions returned to the negotiating table after a weekend meeting with Perez. Verizon and the unions could not be immediately reached for a comment. – **Reuters**

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Legacy file-sharing client BitTorrent is making a move into media with [a new BitTorrent Live TV streaming app](#), laying the groundwork for a new BitTorrent TV streaming service. The app will be available on Apple TV, Mac OS computers and iOS devices later this week.

With it, you'll be able to watch free streams from 13 content providers. None of them are big "gets" by any stretch, with highlights including Clubbing TV, TWiT and Newsmax TV, though the plan is to expand upward beyond the free tier with the addition of cable networks and premium content.

What that premium content will include remains to be seen, but [Variety reports](#) that the focus will be on coverage of live events like news and sports. BitTorrent won't rule out cable networks and outside providers like HBO, but it didn't offer much by way of a game plan for adding them. Whatever it ends up looking like, the first slate of premium BitTorrent TV channels is planned for a summer launch. – **CNET**



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