

BROADBAND

Big Tel sweeps legislative calendar

Broadband Alliance
disappointed in outcomes

By Ariel Carmona, Jr.

acarmona@willitsnews.com

@AOCarmona on Twitter

The Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County is disappointed in how this year's legislative efforts turned out. Big telecommunications companies seemed to be winning at every turn. Following the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County's public outreach meeting in Ukiah earlier this month and the conclusion of the California Legislative session Friday, Alliance Chair Trish Steel gave an update on pending legislation with the potential to impact broadband communications throughout the county.

BROADBAND » PAGE 10

spective.”

the design and produc- record. “The process can eral months depending on mances,” Peters said.

the problem worse.

Broadband

FROM PAGE 1

According to the notes the Alliance made public from the Sept. 8 meeting in Ukiah, AB 1665, the “Internet For All Now Act” re-authorizes the state’s broadband program, funded through a cell phone surcharge (average of 17 cents a month per line). Steel said via email, “What started out as a good bill which we supported has changed through the amendment process into a bill we can no longer support and are actively opposing.”

From the Alliance’s perspective, there are many “give-aways” to large telecommunications carriers and barriers for independent smaller providers, among other issues. After passing the Assembly (Assemblyman Jim Woods D-Healdsburg voting yes), and easily moving out of the Senate Utilities Committee, it was approved by the Senate by an overwhelming

32-2 vote. Mike McGuire (D-Healdsburg) and Janet Nguyen (R-Garden Grove) both cast no votes. The bill drops California’s minimum speed standards and also allocates \$300 million in construction subsidies.

Another bill which was approved by legislators last week was SB 649, the Small Cell Bill. This legislation gives telecommunications companies and mobile carriers open access to poles and other property owned by public agencies, such as cities and counties, and the ability to set rental rates far below market value.

The bill passed the Senate by a 22-10 vote last week with eight “no” votes recorded and passed the Assembly by a 46-16 vote with 17 “no” recorded.

Steel said the bill could be bad for cities because they lose local control and revenue. According to the Alliance’s analysis, city governments are very strongly opposed to it because it takes away local control of these contracts. The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors submitted a letter

in opposition to the bill on Aug. 29, but the bill subsequently passed the Senate and the Assembly as it only needed a simple majority to pass. According to Steel, It’s now up to Gov. Jerry Brown to decide if AB 1665 and SB 649 will become law.

“If enough people write the governor and urge him to veto AB 1665, maybe he will,” Steel posted on the Alliance Facebook page this week. She added the bill was corrupted by industry amendments, lowering speeds at a time when data usage is on the rise.

Steel said via email, “In addition to other provisions the Alliance considered harmful, regions that are already 98 percent served are ineligible for funding, and since Mendocino is part of a highly-served region which includes Marin, Napa, and Sonoma, Mendocino County as a whole is ineligible for funding from this program.”

One of the bill’s co-authors Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (D-Winters) said earlier this year she knows firsthand how internet access

can transform a community.

In reference to SB 649, The League of California Cities posted a statement online noting that in their assessment, the proposal unnecessarily and unconstitutionally strips local authority over public property and shuts out public input and local discretion by taking away consideration of the aesthetic and environmental impacts of “small cells.”

They had urged city officials throughout the County to send a letter of opposition to the bill’s author Sen. Ben Hueso (D-San Diego).

SB 649 was supported by, among others, the Digital Future Alliance, launched by Verizon in partnership with a number of organizations including the NAACP, the Latino Coalition, and the National Hispanic Medical Association.

A bill which the Alliance did support but failed to pass is AB 375, the Internet Privacy Bill. The bill would have required state

legislators to write into California law, internet privacy protections that were scrapped by the federal government. According to the Alliance analysis, generally larger providers were opposed to it because among other restrictions, had the bill been approved, they would not have been able to use and resell subscriber information. Smaller consumer groups and smaller Internet Service Providers were in favor of it.

Steel said though the bill started in the Assembly as a video arcade bill which easily passed 77-0, when it got to the Senate it was “gutted and amended” to be the privacy bill.

“Unfortunately the telecommunications money made a clean sweep,” Steel said in reference to the passage of AB 1665 and SB 649 and the failure to pass the internet privacy bill.

Senator McGuire voted “yes” in committee and Assembly member Wood did not vote on the bill according to Steel. She said in an email his “yes” vote

was for the video arcade bill, but Wood never had the chance to vote on the privacy one since it never made out of the Senate and back to the Assembly.

On the national front, a comment deadline for the public of Aug. 31 passed on Net Neutrality and there were a record 21 million comments tallied.

“Net Neutrality will very likely be overturned,” the Alliance analysis stated. “As Chairman (Ajit) Pai is committed to such action and he has a majority on the Federal Communications Committee.” According to Wikipedia, net neutrality is the principle that internet service providers and governments regulating the internet must treat all data on the internet the same, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, website, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or mode of communication.

The Alliance will meet again on Friday Nov. 3 at the Community Foundation of Mendocino at 204 S. Oak Street In Ukiah.