

# Kiss your landline goodbye?

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By B. Blake Levitt / Tricornernews.com

If AT&T and Verizon have their way, we can kiss our beloved landline phones goodbye.

For the second year in a row, AT&T has introduced legislation into Connecticut's Committee on Energy and Technology (E&T) that will allow them to restructure their entire relationship with customers and oversight/regulatory committees to no one's advantage but their own. And our E&T committee, which shows sure signs of having been captured by the very industries they are supposed to vet, has again passed another disgraceful bill along to the legislature.

Last year's ignominy was Bill #442 which would have allowed AT&T to abandon their entire landline network and would have opened all state lands and preserves to cell towers with only an expedited review by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC), which has final authority over such infrastructure here. Both of those regulatory agencies were appallingly in favor of that bill. After considerable pressure from environmental groups, labor unions, seniors, and others, then-House Speaker Christopher Donovan refused to bring it to a vote and #442 withered on its strange corporate vine. Hopefully our current House Speaker Brendan Sharkey will do the same with this year's weird crop.

This year's bill, which began as HB 6402 and is now File #428, was again voted out of E&T with an astounding 24 yeas and only 4 nays, with the same recommendation that the full legislature pass it. What are these legislators thinking? Readers in the rambling rural northwest 30th congressional district take note: Senator Clark Chapin was among the 24 yeas, revealing another smart guy not doing enough homework.

These bills are identical to ones introduced all over the country, written by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an industry group that creates industry-friendly laws on any number of issues to introduce at the state level. Their telecom bills are fundamentally deregulation schemes dressed up with confusing language that makes legislators think the bills are about promoting better technology, therefore progress and jobs, jobs, jobs. The overt business threat, of course, is that Connecticut will be left behind in the economic turnaround if we don't give them what they want. But it's all a smokescreen.

AT&T and Verizon are robust ALEC members and wrote the legislation. By 2012, according to the Huffington Post ([www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/atts-fcc-petition-should-\\_b\\_267509...](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/atts-fcc-petition-should-_b_267509...)) AT&T has been able to get 23 states to remove some, if not all, telecom regulations via this route after the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) gave them permission to do so. Many states fell for the same

PR double-speak and have lived to regret it. Some now think that AT&T should be investigated for lying about key aspects in their misleading PR campaign. They say, for instance, that there are two systems: the older Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTN) and a newer Internet Protocol or IP-enabled network and that their newer U-Verse services rely on the latter. In fact, U-Verse is a PSTN network using copper.

For a real eye-opener on their deception, see “AT&T’s FCC Petition Should be Denied: AT&T should be Investigated,” by tech writer Bruce Kushnick at [www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/dear-telecom-unions-time-\\_b\\_270729...](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/dear-telecom-unions-time-_b_270729...) He notes that AT&T’s U-verse is over PSTN and handles broadband, internet and VIOP as their digital voice. Clearly AT&T is not suffering with their current infrastructure, and if they are, it is of their own making.

To see the confusing bill #6402 and who voted for it at E&T, go to [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov) and punch in #6402 at the top. Under Text of the Bill, click the File No 428 PDF. To see comments, click on the Joint Favorable Report (ET Joint Fav. Rpt) link on the right. Favorable comments are first. Note the same mantras from various chambers of commerce, businesses and legislators about how badly we need the latest, greatest, and fastest connectivity or we will lose business to others states, none of which is true. These are straight from AT&T’s talking points.

But the most telling assessment is by Elin Katz at the Office of Consumer Counsel, who pointedly notes, “This is not a ‘modernization’ bill, but simply a ‘deregulation’ bill for ... AT&T and Verizon. This bill essentially seeks to allow them to stop providing basic landline telephone service to Connecticut residents and small business. There are not two networks (PSTN and IP-enabled), but rather they are one evolving network. The elimination of the imputation standard will put the competitive market at risk.”

Our legislators have once again fallen for a corporate pig-in-a-poke.

The fact is at least one in five people still rely on landlines for all of their voice, DSL Internet connectivity and 911 emergency communications, especially in rural areas. Four out of five still rely on landlines for the majority of voice communication. That’s millions of customers. Less than 25 percent of the population has gone to wireless-only households, mostly young urbanites.

So what’s really going on here? The nation’s copper landline network is one of the true wonders of industrialized nations — imagine trying to build a network like that today in a developing country. So why has AT&T allowed its landline network to deteriorate for years? The telecom unions — CWA and IBEW — have been warning about dramatic staff cuts, serious lack of maintenance and depleted inventory not being reordered to the point where they cannot maintain the wires. When complaints come in, service reps have been ordered to tell landline customers to just switch to wireless, and that they cannot guarantee a date for repair. The companies are simply not upgrading the infrastructure, which supports not only phone calls but also broadband Internet, cable, and also wireless service since all wireless

infrastructure is also attached to a wire ([www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/dear-telecom-unions-time-\\_b\\_270729...](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-kushnick/dear-telecom-unions-time-_b_270729...)).

Many customers chose landlines for health reasons, too. Aside from some pacemakers being read into medical offices via landlines, wireless systems use ultra high frequency radiofrequency radiation (RF) for both the handsets and cell tower infrastructure, unlike landlines which are extremely low direct current systems. There are long-standing health and environmental concerns with RF exposures that precede cell technology. In fact, The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) last year classified RF as a 2B (possible) carcinogen, along with mercury, lead, formaldehyde and DDT. There are RF exposures standards at the FCC but they are 17 years old and scientifically obsolete. After being ordered to update by the Government Accountability Office last year, the slow-pokey FCC is finally taking a look. All the while AT&T cynically leverages their customers into wireless with no concern over liability because the states and the feds are giving them permission to do it. Where is choice and safety for the customer in all this?

Clearly there is a hidden agenda in the form of blackmail to remove any limits on mandated service fees so they can charge what it actually costs to maintain landline service. Bill 6402 would remove limits of any kind. Those who live in rural areas will be especially hard-hit, but many businesses also rely on hard-wired networks for voice and data transmission for the simple reason that these are safer and more secure systems. Wireless networks are notorious for going down in emergencies — or for no apparent reason at all. In letting their landline systems utterly deteriorate, are they anticipating taxpayer help to get it back in shape? What's more insidious is that we have been paying to maintain the lines all along with various fees in our bills every month, and we have been paying them to invest in fiberoptic lines to-the-house. So where are they? Where has all that money gone? That's where the investigations should come in.

According to Nora L. Duncan, state director for AARP Connecticut, supporters of the deregulation have portrayed objections as attempts to scare seniors who rely on landlines. But other opposition has recently built as consumer and nonprofit groups have stepped up. Along with AARP, there is now the Office of Consumer Council, Communications Workers of America, Common Cause CT, the AFL-CIO, CT Working Families, Connecticut Citizens Action Group, CT Legal Assistance Resource Center, National Organization for Women and ConnPIRG. Turns out these deregulation schemes, rather than creating jobs, stand to kill hundreds of thousands of them. All of these organizations strenuously object to three key provisions in 6402 that include:

- Allowing AT&T and Verizon to drop almost all landline services with only a 60-day notice to both the state and the customer, including added features like caller ID, long distance, voice mail and call waiting, known in state law as “competitive services.”

- Allowing the state’s service quality standards, which cover critical needs like responding to trouble reports and service outages, to no longer apply to landline services.
- Dropping the annual state specific audit of AT&T and Verizon, which is the only avenue providing information on their performance for service quality, standards, and whether they are investing in the CT network, infrastructure, modernization and jobs.

In other words, what AT&T and Verizon want is no oversight, no accountability, no regulation of any kind, and the ability to tell all of Connecticut “too-da-loo” in 60 days if they feel like it. In exchange for what? Talk about the bum’s rush to lifelong loyal customers. These ALEC bills spell it all out — if one can actually understand their jargon. Apparently legislators could not read between the lines and only fell for the “progress” pitch. But note that there is no real competition here. AT&T is the far dominant provider with over a million customers. Verizon’s footprint is negligible at best and uses AT&T’s wires.

The more fundamental question is: why is AT&T and ALEC writing any of our bills? And how come so many of our legislators don’t recognize it? Rep. Roberta Willis (D-64 ) said, “Abandoning landlines would be devastating. Hardwired phone service is a necessity in areas like Northwest Connecticut, where cell service is limited.”

Amen to that. We need more regulation and enforcement, not less. And ALEC should be handed their hat.

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<http://www.tricornernews.com/node/29924> - Part 1

<http://www.tricornernews.com/node/30071> - Part 2

<http://www.smartmetereducationnetwork.com>