

Verizon makes changes as lawmakers decry firefighters’ woes

By **DON THOMPSON**
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Verizon rolled out changes Friday as state lawmakers said they were outraged to learn the telecommunications company had slowed firefighters’ internet service while they battled what became the largest wildfire on record in California.

Verizon said it removed all speed cap restrictions for emergency workers fighting wildfires on the West Coast and for those in Hawaii, where emergency crews were rescuing people from areas flooded by Hurricane Lane.

The company promised to lift restrictions on public safety customers and provide full network access when other disasters arise.

The announcement came hours before the state Assembly Select Committee on Natural Disaster, Response, Recovery, and Rebuilding held an informational hearing on the incident.

The goal is to determine “how we ensure that all public safety has the tools they need in some of our hardest moments in California’s history battling these natural disasters,” said Democratic Assemblywoman Monique Limon of Santa Barbara.

The Santa Clara County Fire Department has said Verizon slowed its internet communications at a wildfire command center three weeks ago, crippling an emergency communications truck’s data speeds and forcing firefighters to use other agencies’ internet connections and their personal cellphones.

The county disclosed the problem last week in a



In this Aug. 7, 2018 file photo, firefighters monitor a backfire while battling the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex Fire near Ladoga, Calif. A nationwide telecommunications company that slowed internet service to firefighters as they battled the largest wildfire in California history says it has removed all speed cap restrictions for first responders on the West Coast.

AP Photo/Noah Berger, File

lawsuit brought by 22 state attorneys general seeking to restore net neutrality rules repealed by the Federal Communications Commission. The court filing alleges that the slowdown was caused by the FCC’s action, which allows telecommunications to slow internet speed to selected customers.

California lawmakers are considering a bill that would require internet companies to restore net neutrality in California, requiring equal data access to all customers.

Meanwhile, U.S. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Rep. Anna Eshoo, a senior member of the Energy and Com-

merce Committee, and 11 other Democratic members of Congress sent a letter to the Federal Trade Commission calling Verizon’s action “unacceptable” and demanding an investigation into whether it amounted to “unfair or deceptive” practices.

Dave Hickey, Verizon’s vice president of business and government sales, told lawmakers the error by the company had nothing to do with net neutrality.

Rather, the county had used up its monthly data capacity under an internet plan that allows Verizon to significantly slow service. The department bought a government high-speed

wireless data plan that provides an unlimited amount of data at a set monthly cost, but the company reduces speeds if the buyer exceeds certain levels of use during that billing cycle.

Santa Clara County Fire Chief Anthony Bowden called unlimited data flow critical to public safety but said public agencies do not have unlimited funds and try to find an affordable plan that will meet their needs.

He also called for increasing protections to cell towers in fire-damaged or fire-prone areas to maintain critical communications and warnings to area residents as well as first responders in emergencies.

BRIEFLY

Lamb Weston wants change to pollution permit

BOARDMAN — Lamb Weston wants to update its air pollution permit for its Boardman potato processing plant to discharge 36 percent more volatile organic compounds a year. The public has until Sept. 11 to comment on the proposal.

VOCs are organic compounds that combine with other elements in the atmosphere to cause ozone or smog. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality allows the Lamb Weston plant at 750 Columbia Ave. N.E., Boardman, to discharge up to 39 tons of VOCs a year. That permit is five years old. The company is renewing the permit and wants to discharge up to 53 tons of volatile organic compounds a year.

Lamb Weston has upgraded the plant with new equipment and processing lines since the DEQ issued the permit in 2012. The new permit would reflect those changes.

The DEQ announced the public can submit comments for the record regarding the air quality permit renewal by 5 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 11. The public can send those comments to: Nancy Swofford, Permit Coordinator, 475 N.E. Bellevue Dr., Suite 110, Bend, OR 97701. Email: swofford.nancy@deq.state.or.us

Markets indices close at record highs on Friday

NEW YORK (AP) — The benchmark S&P 500 index closed at an all-time high, just two days after the current bull market in U.S. stocks became

the longest in history. The Nasdaq composite and the Russell 2000 indexes also ended the day at all-time highs.

Technology companies, the best-performing sector in the market this year, accounted for much of the gains. The price of oil snapped a seven-week losing streak, finishing this week about 5 percent higher.

The rally capped another solid week for the stock market, which has been riding a wave of strong corporate earnings even amid uncertainty over simmering global trade tensions.

“It appears that the market is really focusing on fundamentals,” said Rob Eschweiler, global investment specialist at J.P. Morgan Private Bank.

Heppner chamber meeting includes agencies overview

HEPPNER — The upcoming Heppner Chamber of Commerce meeting will feature an all-entities report.

People will receive a variety of updates from those who present information.

The meeting is Thursday, Sept. 6, at noon in the Heppner City Hall conference room.

The no-host lunch, which is catered by Tacos Hometown, costs \$10. The menu offers a choice of a beef or chicken burrito, and includes chips, salsa and dessert.

Those planning to attend need to RSVP by Friday, Aug. 31, to ensure there’s adequate seating and enough food (include beef or chicken preference). For more information or to reserve a meal, contact 541-676-5536 or heppnerchamber@centurytel.net.

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