

The End of Local Control?

The California legislature, under intense pressure from the wireless industry, is considering a number of bills that would allow telecoms to run roughshod over local zoning laws and push their new technologies into our neighborhoods whether we like it or not.

This blatant power play by the telecoms undermines the whole purpose of local zoning laws and the election of local officials who represent the interests of their constituents. It mocks the idea that the people who live in the community should have some say over how – or even if – every new technology that comes along must be automatically accepted.

The industry's latest marketing blitz for "5G" ignores the fact that 5G doesn't offer any actual improvement over our current service. It won't improve our phone connections, and it's not required for national security or first responders. It won't fix the digital divide or make driverless cars safer. The true purpose of 5G is to allow telecoms to compete with cable companies to stream your Netflix or Hulu movies without having to run a wire to your home. It's that simple.

It doesn't even work that well. Wireless connections are slower, less reliable, more easily hacked and generally more expensive than fiber-optic connections. They're also subject to certain obsolescence. (You'll need to buy a new 5G-enabled phone if you really need to be able to download a movie onto your phone in under 4 seconds.)

Wireless connections also come with serious health concerns for everyone, especially children, women who are pregnant, people with compromised immune systems and those with implanted medical devices. The concern over safety has grown significantly since a 2018 National Institutes of Health study proved that exposure to RF radiation (which is emitted 24/7 by all small cell antennas) can cause cancer and DNA damage. If a small cell is installed in front of your home or apartment, you'll be exposed to the radiation whether you like it or not.

These telecom-sponsored bills are not only unnecessary, they set a dangerous precedent for the future. Suppose a community doesn't want facial recognition or personal tracking technology in its residential neighborhoods? If these bills are passed, communities will have no say about the matter. It will be up to the telecoms themselves to decide how to integrate their lucrative new technologies into our lives.

The California legislature has better and more important things to do than spend taxpayer dollars helping the wireless industry trample on the rights of Californians. I hope that (*insert name of local Senator and Assembly members*) will respect and protect our right to determine how – or even if – every new technology that comes along will become part of our lives.