



## Illinois lawmakers advance law change to boost Internet

Mike Riopell | Posted: Wednesday, May 5, 2010 10:12 pm

SPRINGFIELD — State lawmakers Tuesday began a push to let phone companies such as AT&T pay less attention to their land-based phone lines and shift more focus to broadband Internet and wireless services.

The move could mean more options for high-speed Internet in areas of central and southern Illinois that don't have access.

A new version of the state's main telecommunications law was approved by a House committee Tuesday and now moves to the full House. It hasn't been changed since 2001, and Illinoisans' reliance on landline phones has dropped significantly since.

"Broadband is the key to keeping and creating jobs in Illinois," Paul La Schiazza, president of AT&T Illinois, told lawmakers.

State Rep. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro, said the law could put Illinois in a position to compete with other states that have made the same changes but Illinois is behind.

He cautioned that lawmakers shouldn't take credit for creating jobs through the plan.

"The companies create jobs when we allow them to do what they do," Bost said.

Some consumer advocates, however, protested. Although the plan could allow AT&T, for example, to free up cash to extend broadband Internet to rural areas, the Citizens Utility Board would like to have seen that expansion as a requirement.

Otherwise, the company might focus the money elsewhere, CUB policy analyst Brian McDaniel said.

"The investment's going to Chicago," McDaniel said. "That's where the people are."

Bost shot back.

"Get back with your members and get a clue where we're at," he said.

The legislation is Senate Bill 107.