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## Daniels backs deregulation of phone, cable service

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INDIANAPOLIS -- Gov. Mitch Daniels said yesterday that he supports legislative efforts to scrap most regulation of local phone service and to provide incentives to encourage the spread of high-speed Internet access across Indiana.

"A regulatory approach that grew up in the age of telephone poles and above-ground wires, what were thought of as actual monopolies, is just not suited to today's exciting world of exploding technology, new inventions, multiple choices and options," Daniels said.

Sen. Brandt Hershman, R-Monticello, this week introduced Senate Bill 245, which would make substantial changes in the way that phone and cable service are regulated.

His goal is to increase customers' choices in both areas and encourage the development of more communications infrastructure in the state.

The bill was criticized by consumer advocates as an open door for price increases. But Hershman downplayed that, saying in part that there is no evidence to support such concerns. The legislation also has bipartisan support.

The Senate Homeland Security, Utilities and Public Policy Committee is expected to consider the bill at a meeting Tuesday.

Similar legislation has been introduced many times in recent years but often has bogged down in the Senate.

This year, however, Senate President Pro Tem Robert Garton, R-Columbus, seems open to regulatory changes. The chairman of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission has not publicly opposed it, and now the governor seems to be on board.

Daniels said yesterday that his administration has "been working quite closely" with the bill's authors.

"The bill has a lot of features that I agree with," Daniels said. "I'm going to work with them closely to shape it."