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Where AI policy is really getting made

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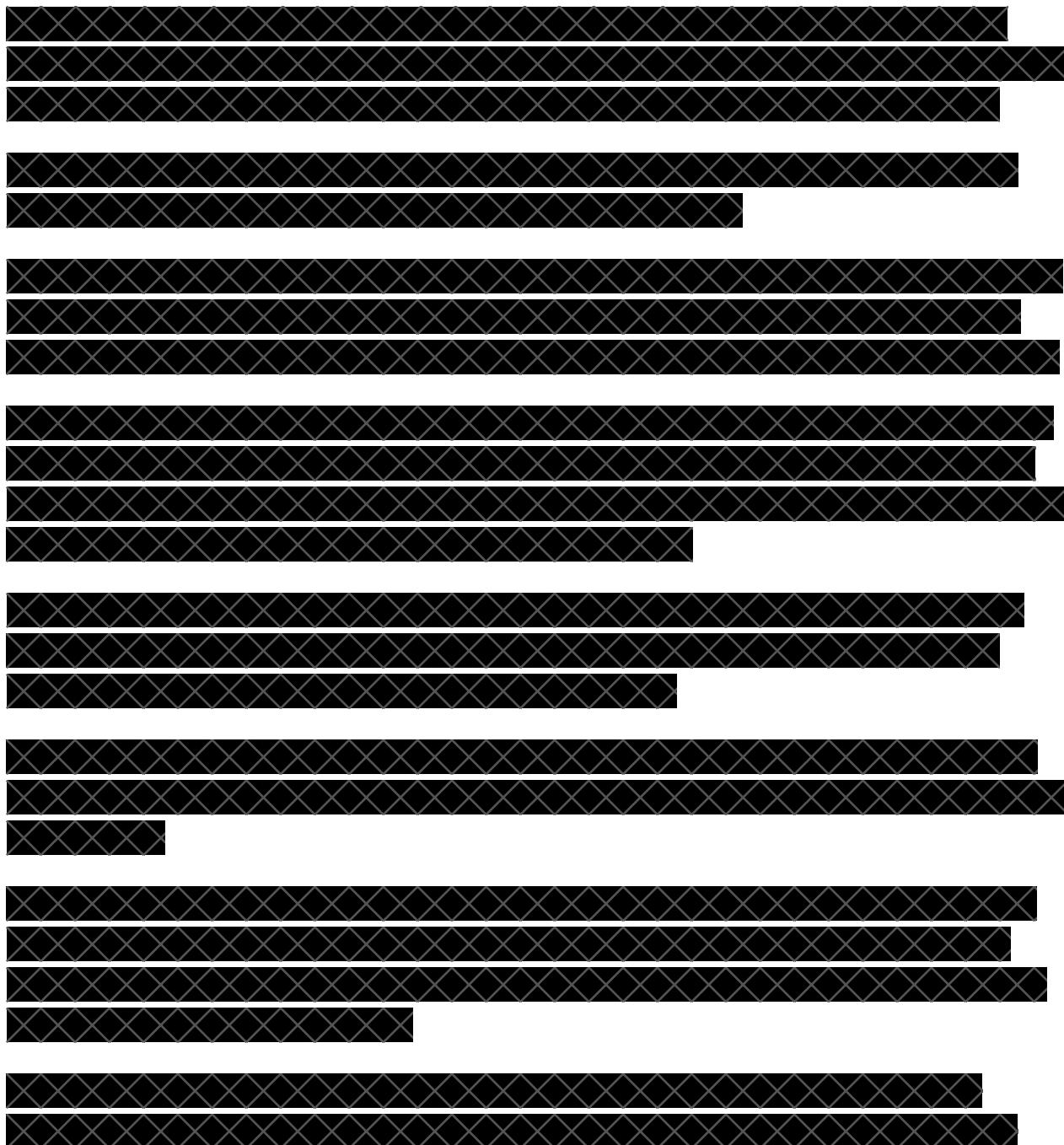
One place has consistently — if ploddingly — pushed forward tangible tech and AI policy developments: the courts. | Yasuyoshi CHIBA/AFP via Getty Images

QUICK FIX

- As California and Congress cogitate, courts have become where AI policy actually gets crafted.
- Verizon tries to put out little fires as it hopes for approval of the Frontier merger.

Welcome to California Decoded! Glad to have you back with us, we know you had to suffer through all that turkey and football without us. Send feedback, scoops and story ideas to californiadecoded@politico.com.

DRIVING THE DAY





INFLUENCE AND INDUSTRY

DEADLOCKED — Verizon remains at a standstill as it hopes to get its [\\$20 billion acquisition of Frontier](#) past the finish line. But recent communications and other documents from the California Public Utilities Commission's database reveal the telecom giant has faced hurdles with various parties behind the scenes.

Bigger picture: California still has yet to give the deal its blessing after the telecom giant promised FCC Chair **Brendan Carr** it would roll back diversity, equity and inclusion practices in order to win federal approval. The CPUC says the move could be a direct conflict with state law.

California and New York are the only states left to give their stamps of approval out of the 13 Verizon needs. Federal antitrust approval for the transaction expires in mid-February.

In the meantime, the latest documents show Verizon has been meeting with CPUC representatives to lay out how it's been engaging with community groups and labor to garner more support.

One step forward: One [document recently submitted](#) by Verizon's attorneys to the CPUC database reveals the telecom company had a meeting in early November with representatives from CPUC Commissioner **Matthew Baker**'s office. It provided an overview of the public benefits it has agreed to in settlement agreements with Cal Advocates, the Communications Workers of America District 9 and the California Emerging Technology Fund.

Verizon also said that it came to an “agreement in principle” with the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, which was [granted party status](#) in September. CETF earlier this year [proposed that the giant enter](#) a partnership with the tribe over broadband deployment in the area.

Two steps back: After a report last month revealed that Verizon planned to [cut roughly 15,000 jobs](#), another [filing shows the Center for Accessible Technology](#), a California nonprofit focused on tech accessibility, was quick to alert the CPUC. The nonprofit accused the telecom company of lacking commitments to its non-union employees, arguing its settlement with the Communications Workers of America only applied to union workers, and that it has only committed to additional benefits for Frontier's non-union employees for as little as a single year.

In another meeting last month with CPUC representatives, Verizon provided an overview of the job cuts and clarified that in California, these would only affect management and not union-represented employees, a [separate filing](#) showed.

When the party's over: The California African American Chamber of Commerce was denied party status, [documents show](#), after Verizon and Frontier opposed the motion, claiming the CAACC included “inaccurate quotations and material misstatements of fact and law.” Telecom company Utility Pole Masters was also denied because of timeliness.

[Other documents show](#) that the CAACC, alongside representatives from other groups, had a discussion a few days before the denial with **Stephen Neal**, legal adviser to Commissioner Baker, in November about the implications of the merger. A dozen participants raised questions about future protections for diverse suppliers doing business with Frontier.

At that meeting, the CAACC submitted [non-party recommendations](#) that included a \$25 million community investment fund for business partnerships, a CPUC-approved community advisory panel that would focus on outreach and review public reports, and a biannual regional disparity study to inform corrective actions, among other requests.

BYTE SIZED



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