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The reformer: Verizon's Eve has big goals

BY TOM ZANKI

It didn't take long for Leecia Eve to get up to speed.

Six months after taking over as Verizon's vice president of government affairs for New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, the Harvard-educated lawyer, who has worked for some of the top political names in the country

(Clinton, Biden and Cuomo among others), now is trying to do the same thing for the Garden State.

As Verizon's chief public policy advocate for the tri-state area, she uses words like "oppressive," "stringent" and "unreasonable" to describe state government's oversight of the industry.

She says New Jersey's telecommunication

regulations are overdue for an overhaul.

"New Jersey in so many respects is such a forward-looking state," Eve said. "But right now, it is looking very backwards in terms of regulatory environment.

"In many respects we, in part, as a traditional telecommunications company, have

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Leecia Eve, VP, government affairs, for Verizon's tri-state region.
—AARON HOUSTON

SPOTLIGHT: SMALL BUSINESS

Taking a shot

Exclusiv finding its place in crowded vodka market

BY MARY JOHNSON

The first time Serge Chistov walked into the West Caldwell offices of R&R Marketing, a wine and spirit distributor, he spent 40 minutes pacing the reception area, just waiting to be seen.

He knew the company and what it could bring to his growing brand of vodka, Exclusiv. But the company had no idea who Chistov was. Sight unseen, he was just one of dozens of vodka companies vying for a

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Serge Chistov, CEO, Exclusiv Vodka. — AARON HOUSTON

Ready to roll: Jersey City has new plan for emergencies

BY JOSHUA BURD

With Hurricane Sandy still fresh in their minds, it was time for Hudson County business leaders to compare notes on how they weathered the storm.

So when they met last February, a group comprised mostly of Jersey City's financial service firms shared what worked well and where they could improve. They also recalled trying to run their offices amid street closures, curfews and other obstacles — and they realized they could use a little help from City Hall in the next emergency.

"One of the very salient goals that came out of that was building more robust relationships with the public sector," said Maria Nieves, president and CEO of the Hudson County Chamber of Commerce.

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The Giants and Jets failures are not a surprise: No team has ever played on its home field in the Super Bowl.

VERIZON

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one of our arms tied behind our backs, where our competitors don't."

Eve said her top priority is to work with regulators and the branches of state government to streamline New Jersey telecommunications regulations in favor of a code the company believes better reflects modern communications choices.

"(It) is a priority for us to seek critical reforms — not abolishment — but reforms of the existing structure in a way that is going to encourage investment," she said.

Whether she'll get her way remains to be seen. This much, however, is clear: Eve knows how to play the political game.

The Buffalo native brings a broad background in public service, most recently as the chief economic development adviser to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Eve also served as homeland security adviser to Hillary Clinton when she was a senator from New York and was an aide to Vice President Joe Biden when he was senator from Delaware.

"Not only do I appreciate the role of public stakeholders and agencies and their missions in terms of addressing the needs of their constituencies, I actually truly understand it because it was my job," Eve said. "I get it."

Verizon's beef with the state's telecommunication laws is that most regulations were adopted decades ago, long before the proliferation of communications options. Competitors now include cable companies as well as wireless and Internet-based providers.

Eve stresses the newcomers aren't governed as traditional telecommunications providers like Verizon, the state's carrier of last resort (meaning Verizon must provide basic service to any customer who requests it, regardless of the economic viability). And competitors are exempted from "onerous" service quality requirements regarding issues like repair time and how the company addresses out-of-service issues.

Eve said regulations force the company to compile massive amounts of paperwork.

"You don't need this extraordinarily stringent, oppressive, regulatory structure that governs one competitor and, as a practical matter, doesn't govern the others," she said.

Plus, she said the company has to jump through many hoops when upgrading aging copper networks to more expansive fiber systems, a transition that can be stalled by resident objections.

"We are not saying there should not be a regulatory structure over our wireline business," she added. "There's no argument there. The question is what that structure looks like."

All about Eve

NAME: Leecia Eve

TITLE: Verizon director of government affairs for New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, the company's chief public policy advocate for the tri-state area.

AGE: 49

BACKGROUND: Former deputy secretary of economic development in New York and homeland security adviser to U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton. She was also an aide to Sen. Joseph Biden in the 1990s and spent time as an attorney in Buffalo.

EDUCATION: Graduate of Harvard Law School and The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Critics dispute the idea that Verizon, a growing company with \$116 billion in annual revenue, is at a competitive disadvantage caused by overregulation.

Previous efforts to lighten telecommunications regulations have stalled in the Legislature, attracting opposition from consumer advocates and groups like AARP New Jersey that worry looser oversight will result in worse service and higher bills.

AARP New Jersey Associate Director of Advocacy Evelyn Liebman said Verizon inherited an infrastructure that was built by ratepayers, "which some might argue has provided the company with a competitive advantage."

Stefanie Brand, director of the New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel, which advocates for ratepayers of industries governed by the Board of Public Utilities, said differences between how Verizon and its competitors are governed likely even out.

While cable companies providing phone service aren't subject to the same service quality regulations as Verizon, Brand noted that Verizon has a statewide franchise to expand its FiOS fiber network, whereas cable competitors have to gain approval town by town.

"I don't think one has a leg up over the other," Brand said. "In the end, it's not such a slanted playing field."


Verizon said it is investing immense resources in upgrades to land assets, having spent \$5 billion in the last five years on fiber, copper and other systems.

Long term, Eve said Verizon eyes a bigger role for its fiber and wireless business. But she said that job will be easier if the state will change its view, arguing that 26 other states have adopted regulatory systems more appropriate for modern telecommunications.

"We only have a finite number of resources," Eve said. "We can be forced to continue to reinvest in technology (copper) that is 130 years old, or we can use those same resources to invest in the technologies of today and tomorrow."

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The entire Rutgers community welcomes Dr. Nancy Cantor to New Jersey, after her 10 years as chancellor of Syracuse University.

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