

Announcement

Will the FCC Stay Committed to Rural America?

By Byron Dorgan – former Senator Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) urged the FCC to take heed of the effects its Universal Service Fund and Intercarrier Compensation Rulemakings will have on small, rural telephone companies.

Almost every month a new telecommunications innovation is launched that has a profound impact on our lives. And lately we've seen the impact of these telecommunication changes in ways we never could have imagined. In past months we've watched the Egyptian government toppled by citizens using their cell phones to organize mass rallies and send videos of shocking violence against the demonstrators around the world. And in just recent days we learned that it was through sophisticated tracking of a cell phone that led our soldiers to Osama Bin Laden's doorstep in Pakistan. In both cases, a broadband wire line network infrastructure transported these important communications and changed history. Nearly every day, billions of citizens around the globe are using their telephones; both land line and mobile, in ordinary and extraordinary ways empowering them to do new and different things. This is possible because their governments have made access to telecommunications a priority. Here in the U.S. these communications tools are essential for our daily lives. We almost take for granted that every American has access to them. But that's not the case. People who live in rural areas have often struggled to get telephone and broadband service. They get their service only when one of the smaller telephone companies in their rural area builds out the new services to their customers. Today there are new and real questions about whom will be able to access advanced telecommunication services in the future. Will the people who live in rural and hard-to-reach areas have the same access as other Americans? That question is going to be answered by the actions of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the coming months. Unless the FCC protects a time-honored principle called "universal service," millions of rural Americans could be left behind in this telecommunications revolution.

Who will have access?

"Universal service" has a long history. Decades ago, our country decided that telephone service was an essential service, and we made a commitment that no matter where you live, even in the most rural reaches of our country, you should have access to the same telecommunication services available to the people in the bigger cities. Comparable service at an affordable price—that was the basis of the policy of "universal service." It's the law of the land. Now there is real danger ahead that the FCC could seriously undermine the concept of "universal service." The FCC has begun "reforming" the Universal Service Fund (USF) which helps communications providers (both wire-line and wireless) finance the commitments they have made to connect our remote and rural areas. USF funding, along with intercarrier compensation (the system by which providers pay each other for use of their networks) have been key to ensuring that all Americans have access to telecommunications services no matter where they live. Recent regulatory changes have diminished these funds that small telephone companies rely on to provide service in rural America and maintain their crucial network infrastructures. Changes are absolutely necessary to reflect today's broadband world. But as these changes are made, let's make sure we strengthen—not weaken—the system that has helped connect rural America for decades.

Connecting "all" of America!

There is plenty of reason to worry that actions taken by the FCC could have a devastating effect on the ability of smaller and rural telephone companies to continue to provide the most advanced telecommunication services to their customers. The FCC document proposing a new "Connect America Fund" as a substitute for USF describes their interest in "market-driven" policies. But history has shown us that if we had relied on the "market" to move electricity and telephone service to rural and high-cost areas, we'd still be waiting. (Or as a breathless observer once said, "we'd still be watching television by candle light.") This rulemaking is serious business. And the FCC is pushing to complete it in the next four months. I believe the first step for the FCC must be to recommit to the principle of "universal service." The wrong decision by the FCC could be a disaster for the economic future of high-cost and rural areas. Without access to the latest and best telecommunications services, rural areas of our country will be on the wrong side of the digital divide, and consigned to a future without economic opportunity or development. Reform done *right* could pave the way for sustained service and the universal build out of the latest telecommunications service to all Americans in every region of our country and the economic opportunity that comes with it.

What can you do to help?

Contact your representative and senators and tell them you don't support the FCC National Broadband Plan and the digital divide it creates. Share with them the impact the plan will have on rural America and ask they take action to prevent it immediately. The FCC and Congress must reform the plan to ensure the same levels of service to all US customers, not just a select few.

Visit our website for more info and view a sample letter at: www.farmerstel.net or www.fedtel.net.

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Lightning - Before, During and After

Suggestions to save you unnecessary expenses!

Before a Lightning Storm:

- Unplug your cordless phones, answering machines, fax machines, modems, computers, and satellite dishes from their jacks and electrical outlets. We recommend this even if you use surge protectors because those devices cannot guarantee 100% protection.

During a Storm:

- Stay off the telephone unless you need to make an emergency phone call. Lightning does strike telephone lines and there is a chance you could be hurt if you are on the phone.

After the Storm:

- If you notice problems with your service, make sure that a damaged cordless phone, answering machine, fax machine, modem, computer or satellite dish isn't causing it. To test, just unplug all equipment from the jacks and electrical outlets. Wait a minute and plug in a standard (not cordless) phone. If the static is gone and phone is working, you can assume your other equipment is causing the problem and may be damaged. This test can save you unnecessary expenses for a service visit.
- If you continue to have service problems and have tested your equipment, call us!
- Please don't wait, assuming that there is a more universal problem that we know about. Report the problem to our one of our offices.



After Hours Repair

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone strive to provide you with quality services, even when our offices are closed. If you experience problems with our services after normal business hours, on a weekend, or on a holiday, we are still just a phone call away. Farmers and Federated utilize the services of Onvoy's Operator Service Center located in Chokio, MN to answer the phone while our offices are closed. Depending on the nature of your call, the Operator Service Center will either process your repair request or forward you to our voicemail message system, where it will be reviewed on the next normal business day.

Tips to Save You Some Green

Follow these steps before you call for repairs:

- Unplug all customer owned equipment, such as cordless phones, computers, satellite dish and fax machines. Often times, removing this type of equipment from the phone jack will reset the phone line.
- Check for electricity going to the power supply - the A/C light should be green.
- Test your line using a different telephone if possible. Did the problem go away?
- If the problem goes away, the customer owned equipment has caused the problem.
- Repeat this process with all customer owned equipment.
- If the problem still exists after removing all of your own equipment, the cause may be with the wiring inside the walls of your home or business, or it may be with the line coming into the building.
- If the problem is with the wiring and the customer does not have a Maintenance of Inside Wiring Agreement, the customer is responsible for the repair costs. With the Maintenance of Inside Wiring Agreement, Farmers or Federated will make the necessary repairs, free of charge.

Office Hours: 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday

Farmers Mutual Repair #: 611 or 1-800-692-0021

Federated Telephone Repair #: 611 or 1-800-374-7133