

U.S. Senator Tim Johnson

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Johnson Introduces Bill to Address Call Completion Problems in Rural Communities

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U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) today introduced the Public Safety and Economic Security Communications Act and submitted the following statement for the record to raise awareness about the call completion problem and invite his colleagues to support the legislation. The bill takes immediate steps to address the call completion problems affecting rural communities across our country and would help restore the fundamental integrity of our nation's communications network.

The Public Safety and Economic Security Communications Act would build upon the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) ongoing efforts and current enforcement proceedings by directing the agency to establish basic quality standards. The bill requires providers that transport voice calls to register with the FCC and comply with basic service quality standards. These quality standards would be established by the commission within 180 days of enactment and would help prevent the discriminatory delivery of calls to any and all areas of our country. Today, Senator Johnson sent his Senate colleagues [a letter](#) to invite them to become cosponsors of the legislation.

Below is Senator Johnson's Congressional Record Statement:

"Mr. President, I rise today to discuss a widespread problem affecting rural communities in South Dakota and across our country. This issue represents both a public safety and economic issue for rural America.

For far too long, rural communities have experienced problems with long-distance or wireless telephone calls that are not being properly connected. The call completion problem extends beyond South Dakota and has affected telephone customers in dozens of states. These call failures create frustration and concern for family members trying to connect with friends and family, as well as small businesses losing business because they miss calls from customers. The problem also poses a serious public safety threat, such as when a police dispatcher cannot reach law enforcement or when a doctor cannot call a patient regarding follow-up care. Rural telephone customers affected by this problem are rightfully frustrated and demand a solution.

I first learned about this issue from the manager of a rural health clinic in Canistota, South Dakota. The clinic has experienced a decline in business as a result of the call completion problems. Incoming calls regularly do not reach the clinic and therefore go unanswered. Additionally, some patients have heard misleading messages about the clinic's number being disconnected, which leads them to believe the clinic has closed. This is just one example of the negative impact this problem is having on communities and Main Street businesses across rural America.

To be honest, I could barely believe it when I first learned about this issue. Today, we should be worried about narrowing the digital divide—not worrying whether rural communities have access to basic telephone service. While many factors could be at play, the Federal Communications Commission believes the use of third-party “least cost routers” to connect calls is a leading cause of the problem. It appears that some of these intermediate providers are failing to properly complete calls to avoid the higher access charges associated with rural telephone networks. It is particularly challenging to resolve the problem because calls are often dropped before they reach the rural telephone network, making it difficult for rural providers to pinpoint when and where problems occur.

Over the past few years, I have worked with many of my Senate colleagues, the FCC, telephone providers, and consumers to fix this problem and hold those causing this problem accountable. I would like to say a special thank you to Senators Amy Klobuchar and Deb Fischer for joining me in introducing a Sense of the Senate resolution last May that directed the FCC to take action to end these discriminatory practices. Since our resolution was introduced, the commission unanimously approved rules to strengthen its ability to monitor and enforce the delivery of calls to rural areas. Although the commission’s rulemaking and ongoing investigation represent a step in the right direction, a more immediate resolution is needed.

Today, I introduced the Public Safety and Economic Security Communications Act. This legislation takes immediate action to stop the bad actors that are failing to complete calls to rural areas. The bill includes common sense reforms that will help end the discriminatory delivery of calls by requiring voice providers to register with the FCC and comply with basic service quality standards. The legislation will help ensure that small businesses, families, and emergency responders in every corner of South Dakota and across our country can once again rely upon connection of their incoming telephone calls.

I invite my colleagues to join me in stopping this problem by cosponsoring the Public Safety and Economic Security Communications Act.

With that, I yield the floor.”

-30-



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