

# A Story FROM THE FOX 9 ARCHIVE

## Explaining Why You May be Experiencing Dropped Calls

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ST. PAUL, Minn. (KMSP) - Many Minnesotans who live in rural parts of the state are familiar with dropped calls, and the Federal Communications Commission says that problem has reached “epic proportions” -- including in Minnesota.

On Wednesday, Minnesota lawmakers got an earful about the problem that has been plaguing phone customers across the nation who try to place a call and are greeted only by a ring tone before the call cuts out completely.

What is known as “least-cost routing” is a dirty little secret of the phone industry. Independent contractors who are supposed to reroute long-distance calls in the cheapest way possible are actually just dropping calls altogether; however, state regulators are powerless to do anything about it because the current telecommunications laws are now antiquated.

For all the wonders a digital, 21st-century world can offer, many of Minnesota’s laws are still stuck at the turn of the last century.

“I have regulatory authority over telegraph lines,” Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman said.

Rothman told lawmakers a telegraph might be better able to reach some rural Minnesotans, because even though the

person who placed a long-distance call may hear the phone ring and ring, the phone on the other end isn’t making a sound.

In fact, in some cases, that sound is nothing more than a false ring tone sent back by the long-distance middle-men who reroute calls in the cheapest way possible, bypassing the rural phone companies that would charge a few pennies more. Those calls get disconnected, and the middle-men who got in the way are getting away with it.

“Currently, wholesale transport providers are not defined in statute, they’re unknown,” Rothman said.

The problem has been hitting communities in west central Minnesota, particularly those along the I-94 corridor, the hardest. In places like Brainerd and Little Falls, even calls to 911 are getting dropped, and businesses say the missed calls are costing them too.

However, only land-line phone companies fall under state regulation. Cell phones are covered by the FCC, and cable is pretty much a free-for-all -- and that’s why the lobbyists were all lined up, someone from Verizon, another from Sprint, and a representative from a trade group representing cable.

“I’ve got three numbers that come through this smart phone, and all of them are regulated completely different,” Brent Christensen said.

The telephone industry has been largely deregulated since the AT&T breakup 30 years ago, and lobbyists remain resistant to anything that smacks of regulation.

The FCC is currently investigating the issue, as is Minnesota’s Public Utilities Commission. There are also a few bills before the Minnesota Legislature that would require big phone companies to track their incomplete calls and document why they were dropped.