

Remarks for the Honorable Doris O. Matsui
Floor Consideration of FY 11 CR - Amendment #468 (Goodlatte)
Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. Speaker, I rise to strike the last word.

Under current law, the Lifeline program provides Americans struggling to climb out of poverty and get back on their feet a choice to receive a landline phone or a mobile phone subsidized by the Universal Service Fund.

In my district of Sacramento, we have 25,000 -- and in the state of California, we have approximately 2 million residents who benefit from this service.

Low income people use Lifeline service to look for a job, call their doctors, reach their child care providers, or contact their family in an emergency.

But Amendment #468 would eliminate USF funding for mobile phone service for the poorest Americans, and maintain it only for landline phones, forcing poor people to stay at home waiting for important calls, rather than getting out of their homes to look for a job.

I've heard from many of my constituents in Sacramento who are concerned about the high costs of services and would be impacted by these cuts to Lifeline services.

I've heard from a woman who is living off a fixed income and is counting her pennies each month to make ends meet. If her bill goes up "by one cent," she says she will have to drop her service.

The Lifeline program allows her to stay connected in an increasingly connected society.

Another one of my constituents, who is disabled, can't afford in-home broadband services and is forced to commute miles to the nearest library to access the internet.

But these all day excursions means that he misses important calls, and if something were to happen to him while he was out, without a mobile phone he would have no ability to call a friend, family member, or 911 for help.

This Amendment would take that cell phone away.

Moreover, this Amendment would not return any monies to the U.S. Treasury.

The Universal Service Fund is supported entirely by telephone users – not taxpayers.

In short, this Amendment picks technological winners and losers.

It ignores input from legislators who have expertise on these issues.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee plans to hold hearings on the Universal Service Fund this year, and the Federal Communications Commission announced its intention to review the Lifeline program.

Finally, the Amendment limits both economic opportunity and discourages employment security.

Studies by the Opinion Research Corporation and MIT have found that cell phones are extremely important to an individual's economic productivity and earning power.

Having access to a cell phone in order to get a "call back" is essential for Americans who are out of work.

When the rest of America is cutting their landlines, this Amendment is forcing the poorest among us to rely on a dying technology which the free market has rejected.

We should be expanding the lifeline program to broadband and mobile phones -- technologies that are in high demand -- and empower consumers to pursue a job, an education, or new career training.

For all of these reasons, I strongly oppose this Amendment, and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield back the balance of my time.