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OPINION

“CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW...
ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM
OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;”

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

Editorial

Rural connectivity

We’re building an information superhighway without rural exits or on-ramps

Over the past decade, the state of Minnesota has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to improve telecommunications, particularly broadband capacity, in rural parts of the state. Here in northeastern Minnesota, that money has gone to install hundreds of miles of fiber optic cable to communities across the region.

Those projects involve huge price tags and they invariably attract headlines that suggest that our political leaders are taking the disparity between urban and rural connectivity seriously. You can think of that fiber as a kind of superhighway, with the capacity to move incredible volumes of information, just like regular superhighways can facilitate the movement of huge numbers of cars and trucks.

There’s just one problem. We’ve forgotten to install the on and off ramps. The city of Orr, as we report again this week, has at least three separate fiber optic cables running right through town, but no one can get Internet. We report on the frustration of two local business owners in Vermilion Lake Township, who have fiber running right past their businesses, but who still must operate on Internet speeds that barely allow them to navigate the web — and that’s when their service is actually functioning.

The missing link in all this has been the corporately-owned service providers, companies like Frontier and CenturyLink, which have failed to uphold their role in the process. Bringing real and reliable broadband connectivity to rural Minnesota is, in theory, supposed to be a public-private partnership. The state or federal government provides the backbone of the system, while the local service providers like Frontier and CenturyLink are supposed to build the on and off ramps so local residents can begin to tap into that information superhighway that runs past their door.

While we’ve been critical of Frontier Communications in the past, the company has, at least, begun to make some upgrades

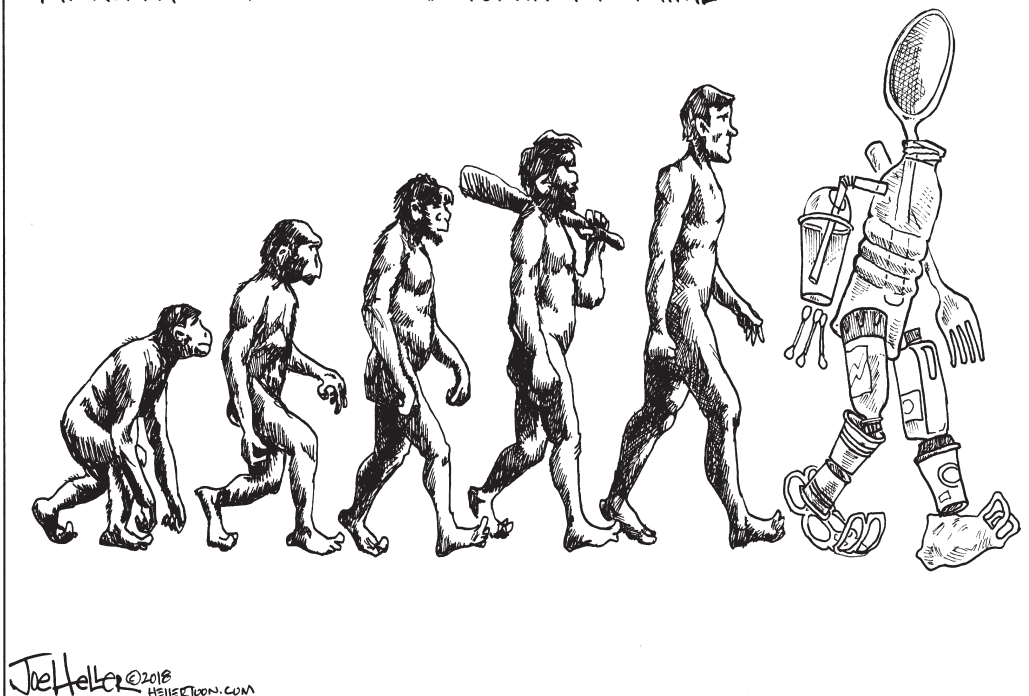
to allow faster speeds in some parts of the region than have been available before. We’ll give credit where it’s due. It’s been a much more frustrating experience for customers of CenturyLink, such as those who live in Orr, given the company’s near-abandonment of parts of its service territory in northern Minnesota.

A partnership can only work when all the partners are willing to pull their weight. We certainly don’t want to discourage the Legislature from investing in bringing fiber to our region. The backbone is a critical part of the solution. But it has to be paired with strict and enforceable commitments by the local service providers to utilize that backbone to bring the level of service now possible to homes and businesses in our region. These service providers are regulated utilities and the Legislature needs to start addressing the lack of investment and follow-through that we’ve seen from some of them. If the Legislature can’t or won’t use enforcement mechanisms, they should explore incentives to encourage other providers to do the job. Ely is currently working with Brainerd-based CTC to facilitate fiber connections to downtown businesses. Orr is now turning to Back40 Wireless for a similar project, using a wifi signal. These are all hopeful developments which should be provided financial support where needed.

If CenturyLink or Frontier can’t do the job, the state should provide the resources needed to enable such organizations to expand the reach of their service.

These days, high-speed Internet isn’t a luxury. It’s absolutely necessary for economic development and community growth in our region. State and federal officials have done a generally good job of laying the backbone for broadband. But until a solution is found to connect that backbone to the residents and businesses who want and, in many cases, need improved Internet access, the job of connecting rural Minnesota remains undone.

MICROPLASTICS FOUND IN HUMANS FOR THE FIRST TIME



Letters from Readers

Rukavina’s letter reflected our experience as well

Thank you, Tom Rukavina, for your letter to the editor published in the Nov. 30, 2018, *Timberjay*. We had a similar experience with staff and personnel at the Mayo Clinic. Every day we encountered people who were different from us. Some were parking valets, some were other Mayo staff including technicians, housekeepers, nurses, pharmacists, and physicians. In fact we observed that many of the physicians and health care staff appeared to be ethnically different from the two of us from “the Range.” It seemed that every one of these employees valued their jobs and were exceptional in what they did.

We could point to many examples where these employees regularly went above and beyond their job descriptions. Each seemed to take their job seriously and made an effort to be friendly and helpful at every turn. They too, like our own forebears, had come here seeking a better life with more opportunities. Most all of them, particularly the doctors, spoke flawless English but perhaps with an accent.

Most all of us are not really all that far removed from an immigrant experience in our own families. It might by now be a number of generations. Besides the indigenous people who were here already, our ancestors came here searching for a better life. They made better lives for themselves and also for us.

By now so many of those cultures have blended together that we tend to forget that we have had some differences in the past. There are new and different people among us now. Are we going to deny them the opportunity for a better life?

**Sally Koski PhD, RN
David Kess
Ely**

We appreciate the Greenwood fire department

At the October 2018 Greenwood Town Board meeting, the board voted to pay the fire department safety officer while he is in Florida part of the winter. Folks, it is required that we pay him because he continues to work, although he does so REMOTELY. Many of his duties do not require him to be onsite and can be accomplished offsite. Increasingly people have the ability to work remotely. The CNBC website featured a May 30, 2018, study finding that 70 percent of professional people globally work remotely at least once a week; 53 percent of professionals globally do so at least half the week. Also, the safety director is considered a FLEX-EMPLOYEE which means he can choose when and where he works. I understand this week he forwarded to our town clerk a final version of the fire department SOG’s. Furthermore, he was already wintering in Florida when his contract was negotiated.

Not surprisingly, John Bassing objects to the pay. The fire department officers do not allow themselves to be bullied and manipulated by Bassing and the cabal, so they become a target. Remember: When it is 20-below at 2 a.m. and a fire call comes in, it is our fire department officers and members who respond; not the John Bassings of the world.

Thank you, Greenwood fire department. We appreciate your service.

**Steve Rodgers
Greenwood Twp**

Tower’s lunch lady deserves a raise

I can really sympathize with the Tower-Soudan school cafeteria cook’s struggles, whom you featured in a recent issue of the *Timberjay*. She has

worked hard for many years, has a great relationship with her clients (the children), and provides a valuable service where she has to be on her feet the entire shift. Food service, no matter what the setting, is usually taken for granted by administrators, whether it be a school, rest home, or hospital. She needs wage and benefit justice.

Personally, I have cooked, baked, bussed and washed dishes, and did the buying for food operations, and it never is only an eight-hour day.

Once, I worked at a “church camp” in Brimson that turned out to be pretty much a front for a right-wing political group. They didn’t pay anything into an employee’s Social Security because you had to sign on as a “contractor”, and your days were often 10, 12 and 14 hours long. They had no workers’ compensation coverage for you because, once again, you are a “contractor.” I found, however, that they paid their guest speakers quite well, and gave them free lodging and meals.

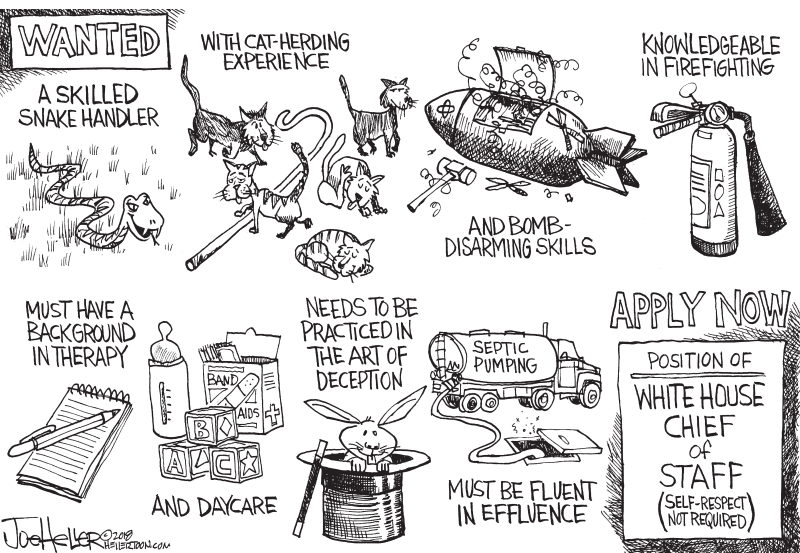
It sounds as if the hard-working lady at the elementary school has tried to be diplomatic and tactful long enough, and she unfortunately has incompetent union representation. I hope she eventually gets the treatment and wage/benefit justice she deserves.

**Mark Roalson
Hoyt Lakes**

We want your letters!

The *Timberjay* encourages letters to the editor. You can submit letters by mail at PO Box 636, Tower, MN 55790, or email letters to marshall@timberjay.com.

We ask that letters be limited to 300 words.



Titanic memories of my trip to northern Ireland

In my last column I told you I’d had the privilege of traveling to Ireland in early September for nine days filled with amazing experiences. This trip was indeed the icing on my cake, largely due to the passion I have for my Celtic ancestry. I left off



SCARLET LYNN
STONE

in Dublin where a friend and I had joined the rest of the fifteen-person tour group, led by Mary Batinich of Lake Vermilion, who had departed the States two weeks earlier and toured Scotland and Wales.

After two nights in Dublin, we departed the

Harding Hotel and boarded a chartered tour bus and headed north to Belfast, located in a lough (sea inlet) which leads out to the Irish Sea. We stopped at a few interesting places on the way, the most fascinating being Knowth, one of Brúna Bóinne’s three great megalithic passage tombs/ancient burial sites in Ireland. Knowth consists of one large mound surrounded by smaller mounds. These sites were built by an ancient culture who revered the earth, nature and

their ancestors, who they buried in these structures. I was amazed how the huge carved stones that encircled the large mound came to rest there. The tomb is located on high ground and there are no other large boulders in view. This was before John Deere, flatbed trailers and heavy equipment! Information at the site states the tombs are associated with the people of the Goddess Danu, a race of supernatural beings who according to tradition ruled Ireland before the coming of the

Celts and afterwards retreated into the fairy mounds and forts. All cultures have myths and beliefs. It was another experience where I question how advanced we earthlings of today really are. We hiked the area for a couple hours, breathing in the fresh Irish air and enjoying the super-green surroundings before boarding the bus to continue to Belfast, the largest city in Northern Ireland.

Belfast has been occupied

Greenwood fire department saves residents money

Some people in the township are constantly complaining about the fire department. One former supervisor has mentioned that his goal is to eliminate it. The residents of Greenwood are incredibly lucky to have a highly rated fire department. I had a conversation with the chief and assistant chief recently and they explained that our fire department is listed as an ISO 7 Class which is the highest class a fire department can be without fire hydrants. A class 10 fire department is the lowest. By having a class seven, we are receiving a discount on our insurance.

I contacted my insurance agent who explained that all companies are different, but the discount generally ranges from 20-percent to 40-percent on our homeowners insurance. I am receiving a 28-percent discount. I had a neighbor check and they are receiving a 25-percent discount.

I researched insurance cost averages by zip code at www.insurance.com. The average listed for a \$300,000 home value, with a \$1,000 deductible and \$500,000 liability is \$1,628. A 25-percent discount would be \$407. For a \$500,000 home, the average is \$2,528. A 25-percent

discount would be \$632.

At a levy of \$150,000 (which is for everything, not just the Fire Department), the amount that Greenwood taxes per \$100,000 of taxable market value is \$31.73. So, for a \$300,000 market value the tax amounts to \$95.19 and for a \$500,000 home, the tax amounts to \$158.65. Looking at what our insurance savings is, clearly we are coming out ahead. Even if the levy doubled, the savings is more than the property tax we are paying.

If the township were dissolved or the fire department folded into a fire district, what is left? We have a nice building and property. Would we then become unincorporated? Would we become a target of annexation? With our market value, I would think we would be. Greenwood has the lowest taxes of any of the towns and cities on the lake. Why would we want to eliminate the benefit that the fire department brings to us?

I applaud the Greenwood Fire Department. I have come to know several of the people in the department. Everyone is positive, dedicated and professional. I appreciate all you do for the community and am so lucky to work with you!

**Pam Rodgers
Treasurer
Greenwood Twp**

The many faces of Donald Trump

CELEBRITY CULTURE

Trump's star-power status is a product of media manufacture; first as a TV showman, then a politician, and finally a master manipulator of news infotainment. A carnival-like atmosphere increased network ratings by drawing attention to a court jester who defeated primary opponents to gain a following of "loyal lemmings."

CRUDE CHARLATAN

The Great Pretender claimed self-made success after receiving millions from his wealthy father. Phony claims of knowledge and intelligence made him a super snake-oil salesman. An elixir of belief over fact duped millions of disgruntled voters seeking easy solutions. If it looks, walks and quacks like a duck, it's a duck!

CORRUPT CHARADE

Deception, pretension and travesty made Trump our first fake President ever elected. A spectacle, ridiculous and rude, berates and browbeats reporters speaking truth to power. Scorn and ridicule is heaped on those who question something claimed true, when it is clearly not.

CALCULATED CHAOS

Personal attack, lying and distraction by a coarse and crass imposter creates division, disorder and confusion. Preying

on civic dereliction and an inattentive citizenry, he targeted scapegoats for their problems, excoriated critics and attacked political correctness.

CRONY CORPORATISM

Money is the only measure of all things valued for Trump, his family and political friends, at public expense. Tax cuts for powerful corporations and the rich brought deeper division through income inequality. His laughing STOCK increases daily the world over.

CONGRESSIONAL CARAVAN An army of Democrats is in town rattling the White House gates. Civility, civic duty and common cause makes democracy possible; critical thinking, commitment and citizen activism makes it work. As Lincoln said, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

**Harold Honkola
Tower**

Don't sugarcoat the G.H.W. Bush record

I'm responding to Lynn Scott in the last *Timberjay*. Glad to hear he is angry at what the current fellow is doing but I would like to add that I don't think the elder Bush should be given accolades. In fact he did many things that people should

be floored about, resulting in the deaths of probably many hundreds of thousands. He bombed working class neighborhoods in Panama. He supplied the Contras with weapons and training that killed tens of thousands of Nicaraguans. He killed soldiers that were retreating from Kuwait in what is known as the highway of death on his way to destroying Baghdad. You described him as honorable but I'm afraid you haven't been paying attention which is easy to do because the media usually doesn't go against U.S. foreign policy and generally keeps us in the dark. Bush was a mass killer and should be tried as such even though he is gone. To put the flag at half mast for someone such as him is an insult to anyone who is paying attention. To watch all the old and new Democrats shower him with kind words should tell us that both the Democrats and the Republicans are in it together and that the U.S. is nothing more than a business, and a corrupt one at that. He and all that came after him from either party have kept us in continual war. The U.S. has no threat against it from any of their victims, only chances to steal more of their resources for the corporate interests that control their puppets in Washington.

**Steve Johnson
Ely**

IRELAND...Continued from page 4

since the Bronze Age (3000 BC-1200 BC). How could I even comprehend that? Soudan, Minnesota, in contrast, has been occupied only since the Taconite Age (Fictitious, late 1800's)! Ireland is SO ancient. We drove along the shore of the lough, past Titanic Studios (where Game of Thrones, the popular TV series, is partly filmed!) on our way to the Titanic Museum.

One of the travelers in our group had an uncle who died in the sinking of the Titanic so we added it to our tour and I was glad of it. The Titanic was built at Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast in 1909 (launched 1911). The six-floor museum is built on the site of the former shipyard and resembles four hulls pointing skyward. It is uniquely impressive with its jagged aluminum exterior that catches the light and greatly resembles ice. One of the most impressive sights in the museum was the full-scale replica of the ship's original oak grand staircase. Of course, me being Scarlet, I have always given a damn about grand staircases! On a serious note, there are so many mostly sobering thoughts about the Titanic. While reviewing the list of the names of those who perished, I saw two sisters with the surname Jussila,

a name in my father's lineage, and I wondered if they might be related. I felt a chill thinking about those poor sisters. After seeing the museum and heating up our credit cards with lovely Irish purchases in the gift shop, we headed into the city center to learn more about the history of Belfast and tour a couple more buildings.

When I was a high school girl in the 1970's there often was coverage of the conflict in northern Ireland on the six-o'clock news. Known as the "Troubles," I recently learned. The period of conflict from 1969 to 1998 between Catholics and Protestants made Belfast one of the world's most dangerous cities. In conversations I had with our Irish bus driver, Mick, these tensions still run deep but more silent these days, yet never forgotten. Mick felt compelled to bring our group to the city of Derry, known as the "cockpit of the Troubles." It is an important part of Northern Ireland and the only remaining completely intact walled-city in the country. It took more imagination than I had to see the worn rock walls from 1619 and imagine how frightening it would have been to live there in the past during times of siege between warring clans,

Viking waterway invasions, and the religious Troubles.

Our driver, Mick, having lived through times of tension, shared his memory about Sunday, January 30, 1972. It was there in Derry, when 13 unarmed civilians were shot dead by British paratroopers during a civil rights march in an event known as Bloody Sunday. He took us to the street where it happened. On that sunny day it seemed so peaceful and serene. The violence in Derry eased in the 1990s and gradually moved to Belfast. Before we departed the city Mick showed us the Peace Bridge that was built and opened in 2011 on the River Foyle to commemorate the Bloody Sunday event and to help link the divided east and west populations of Derry.

We left the tragedy and tensions behind and traveled further west and north to sheep-friendly County Antrim to stay in a white-washed stone bed and breakfast on the coast where we would relax for the evening. Travel partner Julie and I found our room on the second floor of the rambling old B&B. We dropped our suitcases on the floor and flung open our shutter-style windows to reveal the straw colored long grass blowing in the

sea breeze, rolling tree-free hills that met the dark blue ocean as it slammed on the craggy cliffs and rocks below. There were no screens on the windows and no mosquitos either. I chuckled at the vocals of the sheep calling on a nearby hillside..."Maaaa, maaa." Julie and I headed down to the pub for camaraderie and cheer.

The next morning after a hearty breakfast in the sunny dining room, with a rainbow in the sky adrift out over the sea, we headed off to see the Giant's Causeway. I've never seen anything closely resembling it! It's a formation on the shore made of 40,000 hexagon-shaped basalt pillars of varying heights, like steps. They were formed by volcanic activity sixty million years ago, although Irish folklore says the causeway was built by giant Finn McCool to be used as stepping stones to cross to Scotland to fight big man Benandonner after the two hurled one too many insults back and forth. Benandonner is said to have been angered and torn up most of the walkway to Scotland leaving what remains today. Fun stuff! After a busy day and sensory overload we sat in the pub...again... and sipped, then listened to a female Celtic

guitarist sing her beautiful songs.

The next day, we'd head off down small country lanes to see castles, poets' graves, charming picture book towns, and other very Irish things. It was my intensifying hope to find some Irish sweaters ON SALE; after all I still had room in my suitcase while others in the group were buying extra luggage to carry burgeoning amounts of treasures. But WAIT.... this will all be part of my final column about traveling in Ireland. Scarlet heads to the Aran Isles of Inishmore by ferry, purchases a magenta fascinator (hat) in a shop in Ballina, finds sweater-sale heaven, and sucks down some mead at Bunratty Castle near Shannon, while steering clear of the dungeon.

Again I must say it is so enlightening to see how other cultures live, to see where historic events happened and, in the case of Ireland, to have experienced things mystical. To travel for just nine days is like the saying about eating one potato chip...just a taste that leaves you wanting more!

Wikipedia and other online sources used for information not born of Scarlet's head.

OUTAGE...Continued from page 3

during his most recent outage were the continual promises that he received from customer service representatives when he would call to plead for help. "Every day, I was told it would be fixed by that night, but when you hear that ten days in a row you get to feeling pretty hopeless."

Carlson said his experience was exactly the same. He tried calling multiple times a day but had a hard time even getting connected to an actual person. And when he did manage to get through, they would listen for a moment, then offer to connect him with the person who they said could really help him. Invariably, that was the cue for them to disconnect the call.

"They just knew if they could get you off the phone, they wouldn't have to deal with you again. It wouldn't have been so bad if someone had given me an honest assessment."

The situation was maddening, said Carlson, because as a business, he pays more than \$200 a month for his phone and Internet, and the company justifies the higher cost by claiming that he's at the top of the priority list when outages occur. "I can't imagine how long it would have taken for a residence," he said.

A week into the outage, Carlson said a CenturyLink technician did finally show up to assess the problem. And just as Carlson had tried to tell customer representatives several times before, it turned out it was a problem at the junction box up the road. Carlson thought his ordeal was finally at an end, until the technician came back and confirmed the problem and told him he'd have to order parts in order to make the repair. Four days later, with his business still virtually shut down, the technician finally complet-

ed the repair.

Childs, dealing with his own frustration, said he eventually reached out to a regional manager for CenturyLink to complain about his lack of service, and about the years of sub-par service he had experienced. He said the manager sympathized but told him that the company was unlikely to invest much more in upgrading service, or staffing sufficient technicians, in northern Minnesota given the limited number of potential customers.

Childs, like Carlson, had only recently obtained the lowest level of DSL service from CenturyLink. Up until two years ago, Carlson notes, he essentially had no Internet capability other than dial-up, which was all but useless for accessing the web. That's the primary reason he held onto his microfiche reader, which he was able to use for some parts information during the outage.

"People sometimes laugh that I still have this old thing, but I'm glad I do," he said.

Childs said his closest neighbor to the north is in Frontier's service territory and has much better Internet speeds than he can access from CenturyLink. Perhaps most frustrating to Childs was to watch the installation of fiber optic cable along Hwy. 169, which passed right through his property, and then to learn that he would not be able to access it. "I've got a fiber optic cable running through my yard and I'm sitting here with 2.5 meg top speed."

Childs said he doesn't blame the local technicians, who he's gotten to know quite well over the years given his frequent outages. "They're nice guys, but they're so over-worked," he said.

CenturyLink woes continue in Orr

While Childs is justifi-

ably frustrated over his slow Internet in Vermilion Lake Township, CenturyLink customers in Orr are still waiting for any kind of Internet and have been for years. "We're considered an unserved area here," said Orr City Clerk Cheri Carter during an interview with the *Timberjay* just over a year ago. "When new people come into town, they're told they can't get Internet." As of late last year, CenturyLink was telling residents of Orr that they were upgrading capacity and would be able to offer at least basic DSL service by the following summer. Now, more than a year later, Orr residents and businesses still haven't seen the promised upgrade. By rights, residents in Orr should have Internet like a rocket ship. It was actually one of the first communities in the region with a fiber optic connection, and the capacity of the fiber backbone has only grown over time. "We have Paul

Bunyan, CenturyLink, and Frontier, all running fiber down the highway," Carter noted last year.

The situation just confirms what Childs heard from the regional manager when he called about his outage in September. Lack of resources, overworked staff, and little interest on the part of the company in making the investments needed to bring reliable broadband connections to residents and businesses in the region. "We're certainly communicating on a thread here," he said.

CenturyLink has faced challenges to more than just service quality. The company, in late 2017, agreed to settle a lawsuit filed by the Minnesota Attorney General over misleading sales and billing practices.