

Seeback wants ISPs to waive overcharge fees for rural residents

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

"I am calling on Bell Canada, Rogers, TELUS and all internet service providers to stop data overcharges in rural communities during this crisis," stated MP Kyle Seeback in a recent YouTube video, calling out major internet companies for overcharging data payments for those living in rural and remote areas.

The Dufferin-Caledon MP has written letters to all of the CEOs of the large telecom companies, urging them to waive overcharge fees in rural areas.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, families, students, parents and many other residents are either working remotely from home or are simply not working to help flatten the curve of positive cases in North America. This being said, many residents have informed Mr. Seeback of their internet and cellphone bills reaching an all-time high, during the worst possible time.

"The COVID-19 crisis has been tough on all of us. I know many of us are at home all day, by ourselves or with our families. I've been getting a lot of emails recently though, about people in rural and remote communities complaining about the high cost of their cellphone and wireless internet bills," he stated in his video. "Right now, customers living in the rural parts of my riding, are getting bills in excess of \$500, \$600 and even \$900."

Mr. Seeback has yet to hear back from the service providers but plans to follow up this week.

"I think the answer I'm getting right now from the telecoms is that they're worried that in rural areas, with capacity issues, and if they make it free, that too much might be used and it will affect the ability of first responders and others to get signals," he explained. "Unfortunately, for me that rationale just doesn't cut it. Charging people extra doesn't actually necessarily stop them from using. Throttle the speed. At certain points, if the system is getting over capacity, don't send someone a bill for \$900, in the middle of a pandemic."

Mr. Seeback calls out the large telecoms in his video, stating that other companies have stepped up to do the right thing. Now, Seeback believes it's high time the telecommunication giants do the right thing, going so far as to call their actions thus far "unCanadian".

In March, Rogers committed to waiving long-distance fees and removing data usage caps for Canadians until May 30. They've recently extended the commitment until June 30.

"As this public health situation continues to evolve, we're focused on keeping our customers connected to what matters most to them," said Joe Natale, President and CEO of Rogers Communications in a recent news release. "Whether that's staying in touch with loved ones, being connected for digital learning, working from home in new ways or staying informed and entertained, we are here to help."

So, why are those in rural areas still getting overcharge fees? Mr. Seeback plans to find out. Urban areas are constantly seeing upgrades to create better and more sufficient service, with many rural areas still lagging way behind.

"I know this is a burning issue in our riding. I certainly heard about it quite a lot, and we have to try to find some solutions. For example, you drive across Mayfield Road, and you drive 10 minutes and you go from great internet to bad internet, and it makes no sense to me," he said. "I just fundamentally disagree that telecom companies should be investing in 5G technology in urban centers, before they have provided adequate rural internet."

For more information please visit kyleseeback.ca on upcoming works or visit MP Kyle Seeback's Facebook page for more updates.