

Carre Brown: Stone Stands Up for Rural Residents

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Carre Brown, Mendocino County Supervisor
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I'd like to applaud Assemblyman Mark Stone, D-Scotts Valley, for his leadership on a controversial telecommunications measure being considered in the state Legislature. Stone's vote reflects both his understanding of telecom issues, and his commitment to bridging the digital divide ensuring that access is available to all reaches of California.

Earlier this month, the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee approved Assembly Bill 2395 (Assemblyman Evan Low). The bill addresses legacy phone service, and provides a process for legacy carriers to relinquish decades-old obligations that guarantee basic telephone service. On the surface, AB 2395 offers consumers the promise of alternative telecom service. These services, however, primarily rely on fiber or broadband-based networks that are often non-existent and too costly to deploy in rural areas. And, while the bill attempts to require legacy telephone carriers to meet certain thresholds before such a relinquishment, there are concerns that the bill does not ensure alternatives that are affordable, provide good quality-of-service, or will remain viable over the long-term.

Even more concerning, AB 2395 interferes with the safety and basic needs of rural Californians by doing away with their most reliable and often only mechanism to reach emergency services, leaving vulnerable citizens without reliable phone service, and ultimately forcing low-income residents into costly mobile and digital services.

As a coastal county representative, and Mendocino County delegate on the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) board of directors, I am deeply concerned of the potential impacts this legislation would have upon California's rural residents including those living in rural areas of the California coast. The RCRC's 35-member counties comprise more than 52 percent of the state's total land mass, and are home to more than 3.4 million residents. However, the unintended consequences that state legislation can have on rural communities are often overlooked. I applaud Assemblyman Stone for his recent vote and his continued commitment in working on telecom issues that ensure that all corners of the state are able to access critical technology services.

Carre Brown is a Mendocino County supervisor.

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