

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 163

To address the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

Mr. THUNE (for himself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. PETERS, Mr. WICKER, and Mr. MORAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To address the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Telecommunications
5 Skilled Workforce Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. TELECOMMUNICATIONS INTERAGENCY WORKING**
7 **GROUP.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Part I of title III of the Commu-
9 nications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) is amended
10 by adding at the end the following:

1 **“SEC. 344. TELECOMMUNICATIONS INTERAGENCY WORK-**
2 **ING GROUP.**

3 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4 “(1) 5G.—The term ‘5G’, with respect to wire-
5 less infrastructure and wireless technology, means
6 fifth-generation wireless infrastructure and wireless
7 technology.

8 “(2) RURAL AREA.—The term ‘rural area’
9 means any area other than—

10 “(A) a city, town, or incorporated area
11 that has a population of more than 20,000 in-
12 habitants; or

13 “(B) an urbanized area adjacent to a city
14 or town that has a population of more than
15 50,000 inhabitants.

16 “(3) TELECOMMUNICATIONS INTERAGENCY
17 WORKING GROUP.—The term ‘telecommunications
18 interagency working group’ means the interagency
19 working group established under subsection (b).

20 “(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 60 days after
21 the date of enactment of this section, the Chairman of
22 the Commission, in consultation with the Secretary of
23 Labor, shall establish within the Commission an inter-
24 agency working group to develop recommendations to ad-
25 dress the workforce needs of the telecommunications in-
26 dustry.

1 “(c) DUTIES.—In developing recommendations under
2 subsection (b), the telecommunications interagency work-
3 ing group shall—

4 “(1) determine whether, and if so how, any
5 Federal laws (including regulations), guidance, poli-
6 cies, or practices, or any budgetary constraints, in-
7 hibit institutions of higher education (as defined in
8 section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
9 (20 U.S.C. 1001)) or for-profit businesses from es-
10 tablishing, adopting, or expanding programs in-
11 tended to address the workforce needs of the tele-
12 communications industry, including the workforce
13 needed to build and maintain the 5G wireless infra-
14 structure necessary to support 5G wireless tech-
15 nology;

16 “(2) identify potential policies and programs
17 that could encourage and improve coordination
18 among Federal agencies, between Federal agencies
19 and States, and among States, on telecommuni-
20 cations workforce needs;

21 “(3) identify ways in which existing Federal
22 programs, including programs that help facilitate the
23 employment of veterans and military personnel
24 transitioning into civilian life, could be leveraged to

1 help address the workforce needs of the tele-
2 communications industry;

3 “(4) identify ways to encourage individuals and
4 for-profit businesses to participate in qualified in-
5 dustry-led workforce development programs, includ-
6 ing the Telecommunications Industry Registered Ap-
7 prenticeship Program;

8 “(5) identify ways to improve recruitment in
9 qualified industry-led workforce development pro-
10 grams, including the Telecommunications Industry
11 Registered Apprenticeship Program and other indus-
12 try-recognized apprenticeship programs; and

13 “(6) identify Federal incentives that could be
14 provided to institutions of higher education, for-prof-
15 it businesses, State workforce development boards
16 established under section 101 of the Workforce In-
17 novation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3111), or
18 other relevant stakeholders to establish or adopt pro-
19 grams, or expand current programs, to address the
20 workforce needs of the telecommunications industry,
21 including such needs in rural areas.

22 “(d) MEMBERS.—The telecommunications inter-
23 agency working group shall be composed of representatives
24 of such Federal agencies and relevant non-Federal indus-
25 try stakeholder organizations as the Chairman of the

1 Commission, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor,
2 considers appropriate, including—

3 “(1) a representative of the Department of
4 Education, appointed by the Secretary of Education;

5 “(2) a representative of the National Tele-
6 communications and Information Administration,
7 appointed by the Assistant Secretary of Commerce
8 for Communications and Information;

9 “(3) a representative of the Department of
10 Commerce, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce;

11 “(4) a representative of the Commission, ap-
12 pointed by the Chairman of the Commission;

13 “(5) a representative of the Telecommuni-
14 cations Industry Registered Apprenticeship Pro-
15 gram, appointed by the Secretary of Labor;

16 “(6) a representative of a telecommunications
17 industry association, appointed by the Chairman of
18 the Commission;

19 “(7) a representative of an Indian Tribe or
20 Tribal organization, appointed by the Secretary of
21 Labor;

22 “(8) a representative of a rural telecommuni-
23 cations carrier, appointed by the Chairman of the
24 Commission;

1 “(9) a representative of a telecommunications
2 contractor firm, appointed by the Chairman of the
3 Commission;

4 “(10) a representative of a minority institution
5 (as defined in section 365 of the Higher Education
6 Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067k)), appointed by the
7 Secretary of Education; and

8 “(11) a representative of a labor organization,
9 appointed by the Secretary of Labor.

10 “(e) NO COMPENSATION.—A member of the tele-
11 communications interagency working group shall serve
12 without compensation.

13 “(f) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 180
14 days after the date on which the telecommunications inter-
15 agency working group is established, the working group
16 shall submit a report containing recommendations to ad-
17 dress the workforce needs of the telecommunications in-
18 dustry to—

19 “(1) the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
20 Transportation of the Senate;

21 “(2) the Committee on Health, Education,
22 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;

23 “(3) the Committee on Energy and Commerce
24 of the House of Representatives; and

1 “(4) the Committee on Education and Labor of
2 the House of Representatives.

3 “(g) NONAPPLICABILITY OF FACA.—The Federal
4 Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply
5 to the telecommunications interagency working group.”.

6 (b) SUNSET.—Section 344 of the Communications
7 Act of 1934, as added by subsection (a), shall be repealed
8 on the day after the date on which the interagency work-
9 ing group established under subsection (b) of that section
10 submits the report to Congress under subsection (f) of
11 that section.

12 **SEC. 3. TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKFORCE GUIDANCE.**

13 Not later than 270 days after the date of enactment
14 of this Act, the Chairman of the Federal Communications
15 Commission, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor,
16 shall establish and issue guidance on how States can ad-
17 dress the workforce needs of the telecommunications in-
18 dustry, including guidance on how a State workforce de-
19 velopment board established under section 101 of the
20 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C.
21 3111) can—

22 (1) utilize Federal resources available to States
23 to meet the workforce needs of the telecommuni-
24 cations industry; and

1 (2) promote and improve recruitment in quali-
 2 fied industry-led workforce development programs,
 3 including the Telecommunications Industry Reg-
 4 istered Apprenticeship Program.

5 **SEC. 4. GAO ASSESSMENT OF WORKFORCE NEEDS OF THE**
 6 **TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY.**

7 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8 (1) 5G.—The term “5G”, with respect to wire-
 9 less infrastructure and wireless technology, means
 10 fifth-generation wireless infrastructure and wireless
 11 technology.

12 (2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
 13 TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-
 14 mittees” means—

15 (A) the Committee on Commerce, Science,
 16 and Transportation of the Senate;

17 (B) the Committee on Health, Education,
 18 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;

19 (C) the Committee on Energy and Com-
 20 merce of the House of Representatives; and

21 (D) the Committee on Education and
 22 Labor of the House of Representatives.

23 (3) BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE.—The term
 24 “broadband infrastructure” means any buried, un-
 25 derground, or aerial facility, and any wireless or

1 wireline connection, that enables users to send and
2 receive voice, video, data, graphics, or any combina-
3 tion thereof.

4 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date
5 of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the
6 United States shall submit to the appropriate congres-
7 sional committees a report that estimates the number of
8 skilled telecommunications workers that will be required
9 to build and maintain—

10 (1) broadband infrastructure in rural areas;

11 and

12 (2) the 5G wireless infrastructure needed to
13 support 5G wireless technology.

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