

116TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 3355

To address the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 27, 2020

Mr. THUNE (for himself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. MORAN, Mr. PETERS, and Mr. WICKER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

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## 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. DEFINITIONS.**

7       In this Act:

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

1 fifth-generation wireless infrastructure and wireless  
2 technology.

3 (2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-  
4 TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-  
5 mittees” means—

6 (A) the Committee on Commerce, Science,  
7 and Transportation of the Senate;

8 (B) the Committee on Health, Education,  
9 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;

10 (C) the Committee on Energy and Com-  
11 merce of the House of Representatives; and

12 (D) the Committee on Education and  
13 Labor of the House of Representatives.

14 (3) BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE.—The term  
15 “broadband infrastructure” means any buried, un-  
16 derground, or aerial facility, and any wireless or  
17 wireline connection, that enables users to send and  
18 receive voice, video, data, graphics, or any combina-  
19 tion thereof.

20 (4) COMMISSION.—The term “Commission”  
21 means the Federal Communications Commission.

22 (5) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The  
23 term “institution of higher education” has the  
24 meaning given the term in section 101 of the Higher  
25 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

1           (6) RURAL AREA.—The term “rural area”  
2       means any area other than—

3           (A) a city, town, or incorporated area that  
4       has a population of more than 20,000 inhab-  
5       itants; or

6           (B) an urbanized area adjacent to a city or  
7       town that has a population of more than  
8       50,000 inhabitants.

9           (7) SECRETARY.—Except as otherwise provided,  
10      the term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Labor.

11          (8) STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
12      BOARD.—The term “State workforce development  
13      board” means a State workforce development board  
14      established under section 101 of the Workforce In-  
15      novation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3111).

16   **SEC. 3. INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP EVALUATION.**

17      (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the  
18      date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consulta-  
19      tion with the Chairman of the Commission, shall convene  
20      an interagency working group to develop recommendations  
21      to address the workforce needs of the telecommunications  
22      industry.

23      (b) DUTIES.—In developing recommendations under  
24      subsection (a), the interagency working group shall—

1           (1) determine whether, and if so how, any Fed-  
2       eral laws (including regulations), policies, or prac-  
3       tices, or any budgetary constraints, inhibit institu-  
4       tions of higher education or for-profit businesses  
5       from establishing, adopting, or expanding programs  
6       intended to address the workforce needs of the tele-  
7       communications industry, including the workforce  
8       needed to build and maintain the 5G wireless infra-  
9       structure necessary to support 5G wireless tech-  
10      nology;

11          (2) identify potential policies and programs that  
12      could encourage and improve coordination among  
13      Federal agencies, between Federal agencies and  
14      States, and among States, on telecommunications  
15      workforce needs;

16          (3) identify ways in which existing Federal pro-  
17      grams, including programs that help facilitate the  
18      employment of veterans and military personnel  
19      transitioning into civilian life, could be leveraged to  
20      help address the workforce needs of the tele-  
21      communications industry;

22          (4) identify ways to encourage individuals and  
23      for-profit businesses to participate in qualified in-  
24      dustry-led workforce development programs, includ-  
25      ing the Telecommunications Industry Registered Ap-

1       prenticeship Program and other industry-recognized  
2       apprenticeship programs;

3           (5) identify ways to improve recruitment in  
4       qualified industry-led workforce development pro-  
5       grams, including the Telecommunications Industry  
6       Registered Apprenticeship Program and other indus-  
7       try-recognized apprenticeship programs; and

8           (6) identify Federal incentives that could be  
9       provided to institutions of higher education, for-prof-  
10      it businesses, State workforce development boards,  
11      or other relevant stakeholders to establish or adopt  
12      programs, or expand current programs, to address  
13      the workforce needs of the telecommunications in-  
14      dustry, including such needs in rural areas.

15      (c) MEMBERS.—The interagency working group con-  
16      vened under subsection (a) shall be composed of represent-  
17      atives of such Federal agencies and relevant non-Federal  
18      industry stakeholder organizations as the Secretary con-  
19      siders appropriate, including—

20           (1) a representative of the Department of Edu-  
21      cation, appointed by the Secretary of Education;

22           (2) a representative of the National Tele-  
23      communications and Information Administration,  
24      appointed by the Assistant Secretary of Commerce  
25      for Communications and Information;

1           (3) a representative of the Department of Com-  
2 merce, appointed by the Secretary of Commerce;

3           (4) a representative of the Commission, ap-  
4 pointed by the Chairman of the Commission;

5           (5) a representative of the Telecommunications  
6 Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program, ap-  
7 pointed by the Secretary;

8           (6) a representative of a telecommunications in-  
9 dustry association, appointed by the Chairman of  
10 the Commission;

11          (7) a representative of an Indian Tribe or Trib-  
12 al organization, appointed by the Secretary;

13          (8) a representative of a rural telecommuni-  
14 cations carrier, appointed by the Secretary; and

15          (9) a representative from a labor organization,  
16 appointed by the Secretary.

17          (d) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 180 days  
18 after the date on which the interagency working group is  
19 convened under subsection (a), the interagency working  
20 group shall submit to the appropriate congressional com-  
21 mittees a report containing recommendations to address  
22 the workforce needs of the telecommunications industry.

23          (e) POWERS.—

24               (1) HEARINGS.—The interagency working  
25 group convened under subsection (a) may hold such

1       hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take  
2       such testimony, and receive such evidence as the  
3       interagency working group considers advisable to  
4       carry out the objectives of this section.

5               (2) INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

6       The interagency working group convened under sub-  
7       section (a) may secure directly from any Federal  
8       agency such information as the interagency working  
9       group considers necessary to carry out the provisions  
10      of this section. Upon request of the interagency  
11      working group, the head of such agency shall furnish  
12      such information to the interagency working group.

13              (3) POSTAL SERVICES.—The interagency work-

14      ing group convened under subsection (a) may use  
15      the United States mails in the same manner and  
16      under the same conditions as other Federal agencies.

17              (f) PERSONNEL.—

18              (1) TRAVEL.—The members of the interagency  
19      working group convened under subsection (a) shall  
20      not receive compensation for the performance of  
21      services for the interagency working group, but shall  
22      be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu  
23      of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of  
24      agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5,  
25      United States Code, while away from their homes or

1 regular places of business in the performance of  
2 services for the interagency working group. Notwith-  
3 standing section 1342 of title 31, United States  
4 Code, the interagency working group may accept the  
5 voluntary and uncompensated services of members of  
6 the interagency working group.

7 (2) DETAIL OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.—

8 Any employee of the Federal Government may be  
9 detailed to the interagency working group convened  
10 under subsection (a) without reimbursement, and  
11 such detail shall be without interruption or loss of  
12 civil service status or privilege.

13 (g) NONAPPLICABILITY OF FACA.—The Federal Ad-  
14 visory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to  
15 the interagency working group convened under subsection  
16 (a).

17 (h) SUNSET.—The interagency working group con-  
18 vened under subsection (a) shall terminate on the day  
19 after the date on which the interagency working group  
20 submits the report to Congress under subsection (d).

21 **SEC. 4. TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKFORCE GUIDANCE.**

22 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in consultation  
23 with the Chairman of the Commission, shall establish and  
24 issue guidance on how States can address the workforce



1 needs of the telecommunications industry, including guid-  
2 ance on how a State workforce development board can—

3 (1) utilize Federal resources available to States  
4 to meet the workforce needs of the telecommuni-  
5 cations industry; and

6 (2) promote and improve recruitment in quali-  
7 fied industry-led workforce development programs,  
8 including the Telecommunications Industry Reg-  
9 istered Apprenticeship Program and other industry-  
10 recognized apprenticeship programs.

11 **SEC. 5. GAO ASSESSMENT OF WORKFORCE NEEDS OF THE**  
12 **TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY.**

13 Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment  
14 of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States  
15 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees  
16 a report that estimates the number of skilled telecommuni-  
17 cations workers that will be required to build and main-  
18 tain—

19 (1) broadband infrastructure in rural areas;  
20 and

21 (2) the 5G wireless infrastructure needed to  
22 support 5G wireless technology.

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