Thune-Markey Urge FCC/DOJ Action Against Coronavirus Robocalls

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Illegal robocallers leave no opportunity unaddressed, even a pandemic. Thus, Senators John Thune (R-SD) and Edward Markey (D-MA) have urged the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Attorney General of the United States to take action against a bombardment “illegal robocalls, including calls that promise coronavirus testing and possible cures.”

In a letter dated March 23, the Senators cited a recent report that “the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a dangerous threat to consumers in the form of fraudulent coronavirus-related robocalls. Every day, bad actors are placing an estimated one million suspicious calls pertaining to coronavirus, many of which relay deceptive promises of non-existent testing services.

The legislators, both active participants in the process that produced the Pallone-Thune TRACED Act, called upon the Attorney General in particular, noting “the TRACED Act directs DOJ, in consultation with the FCC, to convene an interagency working group to study the prosecution of violations of the Communications Act, and requires this working group to study existing and potential policies to deter international robocalls.” The Attorney General has yet to convene that working group.
As for the FCC, the letter adds “the statute also directs the FCC to initiate a rulemaking to help protect subscribers from receiving unwanted calls or texts; broadens the authority of the FCC to levy civil penalties of up to $10,000 per call on people who intentionally flout telemarketing restrictions; and extends the window for the FCC to catch and take civil enforcement action against intentional illegal robocallers.”

The Senators called upon the FCC and DOJ to use these authorities and report “by April 2, 2020, what concrete steps you will be taking to address this dangerous scourge of coronavirus-related robocalls.”

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