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Some customers of U.S. wireless carrier AT&T were unable to use their cell phones to dial 911 emergency dispatchers in their area for a time on Wednesday, a problem the company later said has been resolved. The second-biggest wireless carrier in the United States said service had been restored after what public safety agencies called a nationwide outage affecting the company's cell phone customers.

"Service has been restored for wireless customers affected by an issue connecting to 911," a representative for the company said in an email statement. "We apologize to those affected."

Earlier on Wednesday evening, public safety agencies across the country said in alerts that AT&T mobile phone customers nationwide were unable to reach 911 emergency dispatchers. "AT&T is experiencing a nationwide outage which is affecting 911 calls," authorities in Washington, D.C., said in an email alert. At 7:40 p.m. EST, there was an increase of AT&T mobile phone customers reporting an outage or problem with their service, according to Outage.Report, a website that tracks cell and internet outages in the United States.

In a message typical of alerts by other public safety agencies across the country, the Seminole County Sheriff's Office in Florida posted its regular 10-digit phone number on Twitter and asked residents to dial that number in an emergency. AT&T had about 135 million wireless subscribers in the United States by Dec. 31, 2016, according to a company filing. Federal Communications Commission officials did not immediately return an email from Reuters seeking comment. – **CNBC**

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incentive is meant to lure companies into rural communities that do not offer the more attractive return on investment found elsewhere.

This perk comes with a price tag. It could amount to a \$14 million loss to the state while costing local governments \$10.4 million, according to budget analysts. The sponsors, Sen. Steve Gooch, R-Dahlonega, and Rep. Don Parsons, R-Marietta, who co-chaired the study panel that met last year, have said they will shift their focus to next year. Parsons, though, will do so reluctantly. "Two bills for rural broadband will have to wait til next year," tweeted Parsons, R-Marietta, as the clock ran out Friday. "Again, paid lobbyists for the rural counties worked against rural interests."

Parsons elaborated later in a blog post that he was referring to the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, which raised objections over how broadly the tax exemption could be applied. Clint Mueller, who is the association's legislative director, said this week that the group pushed for changes that would ensure companies earn the tax break for work done in overlooked communities. Otherwise, the providers will likely continue to bypass rural areas for denser hubs, he said. "That doesn't do us any good," Mueller said. "All that is is just a simple giveaway to a corporation – like corporate welfare – because you're giving them a break and they're not really doing anything in exchange for it."

Efforts to expand broadband into the more sparsely populated areas of Georgia have likely fizzled for this year.

Proposals offering potential fixes didn't gain approval before the General Assembly's Crossover Day last week, when a bill must make it out of one house to have the best chance of becoming law. That has left lawmakers mostly posturing for next year, although House Speaker David Ralston, R-Blue Ridge, said this week that he wouldn't completely rule out action for this year. "We certainly haven't discarded that," Ralston told reporters. "That's a critical piece of economic development in rural Georgia and so finding the best way to implement that is the challenge."

The bills, which will stay alive for next year, emerged from a legislative committee that met last year to study the digital woes of rural Georgia. They included proposals to waive the sales tax on equipment used to deploy broadband in underserved communities. That

Companies, he said, should have to demonstrate they have invested in a previously underserved community, he said. As is, the tax exemption would be available for work in any county where at least 10 percent of residents lack service. That didn't fly with several rural lawmakers either. "Don't think I'm not wanting to get broadband, but we can't open this up for the whole state of Georgia," Rep. Penny Houston, R-Nashville, said to lawmakers at a recent meeting.

Parsons argued, though, that even if improvements are made to existing service, it would still lead to more people gaining broadband. The bill ultimately languished, as did Gooch's bill in the Senate. Other now-delayed measures would launch a program meant to guide local government on becoming "broadband ready" or "gigabit ready." The Senate bill would free electric cooperatives to provide broadband service and require local governments to ease restrictions in the right-of-way – two proposals that are likely to stir up controversy. – *Allied News*

With its \$500-million investment in the maker of Snapchat, NBCUniversal might just prove that you can teach an old dog new tricks. The 90-year-old media company this week scooped up about 15% of Snap Inc.'s available shares during the Venice-based messaging app's initial public offering. The move was part of NBCUniversal's aggressive mission to immerse itself in digital media by forging tight partnerships with leading players of the space such as BuzzFeed News and Vox Media.

Navigating digital media to engage younger consumers is critically important for the company and other traditional media outlets grappling with rapid changes in consumer behavior. NBCUniversal, owned by Comcast Corp., generates about half of its \$7.2 billion a year in cash flow from its traditional TV properties, including the NBC broadcast network and cable TV channels such as Bravo, USA, Syfy, Golf Channel, E!, MSNBC and CNBC. But every year, TV ratings continue to decline, putting pressure on the company to adapt. "Increasingly, people want news and entertainment on a mobile phone," NBCUniversal Chief Executive Steve Burke said Friday in an interview. "We need to respect that."

The investment also is an acknowledgment that traditional platforms and delivery systems such as cable and satellite TV might have reached their peak. Younger consumers are less inclined to sign up for costly cable bundles and are opting instead for Facebook or Snapchat. "An increasing percentage of video consumption around the world is going to be on these platforms," Burke said. "There are a handful of big platforms, and Snapchat is the fastest growing. We need to program for that and take our existing programs and format them for these platforms."

Burke's investment strategy has been different from other big media companies. Instead of gobbling up whole digital companies, which Walt Disney Co., 21st Century Fox and Verizon Communications have done, NBCUniversal has been making shrewd bets with minority investments in just a handful of leading players. NBCUniversal's investment Thursday in Snap — acquiring a 2% equity stake in the company for \$17 a share — represents one of NBCUniversal's biggest digital investments to date.

The company in the last few years has invested \$400 million in BuzzFeed News and another \$200 million in Vox Media, which owns the Verge, Eater and SB Nation. Through such investments, NBCUniversal gets a firsthand look at how younger viewers are consuming their entertainment. The media company can sell ads, promote their shows and customize programs to Snap's audience. "NBC has been the most aggressive of U.S. media companies in terms of strategic investment[s]," said Peter Csathy, founder and chairman of Creatv Media, which advises media and technology companies. "NBCUniversal needs to reach a younger audience ... and that's Snapchat." Snap also benefits from the expertise and advertising dollars that come its affiliation with the media giant that produces such popular programs as "The Voice" and "Saturday Night Live." "Snap needs to expand its audience, [and] the natural way to do that is reach out to some of the older folks and more traditional types," Csathy said.

Burke calls his company's strategy "beacon investing," which has its roots in a \$1-billion bet that Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates made on Comcast in 1997. The investment came at a time when cable companies like Comcast needed money to make substantial upgrades to their networks to handle broadband data transmission, which helped to turbocharge the Internet. "Microsoft didn't put \$1 billion in Comcast to take it over, they thought it would be a good investment and it sent a message that it was important," Burke said.

Embracing the evolution of media, he said, is part of the strategy. "We think we are going to make money on our investments in Snapchat, BuzzFeed and Vox," Burke said. "As importantly, our investments make it clear to our people that these are special companies and we want to work closely with them and learn from them."

NBCUniversal approached Snapchat's leadership team, including Chief Executive Evan Spiegel and Imran Khan, the company's chief strategy officer, in early 2016 about buying a stake in the company. NBCUniversal was told to wait for the IPO, but, in the meantime, the two companies began

working together. They created a pop-up channel for Snapchat users that featured NBC content from last summer's Rio Olympics, which was produced by BuzzFeed. NBCUniversal's E! channel developed a celebrity themed series for Snapchat called "The Rundown."

Other collaborations with Snap are in the works, including an expanded effort to showcase athletic competitions during the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. "We want to do a lot of things with them for many years to come," Burke said. Including the Snap shares, NBCUniversal has invested more than \$1.5 billion in digital businesses during the last 18 months. It bought a software business called SportsEngine that helps manage youth sports leagues.

NBCUniversal also owns the fast-growing Internet movie ticketing service Fandango. And in the last couple of years it added the popular movie ratings website Rotten Tomatoes and listing service Flixster to its portfolio. Through its \$3.8-billion acquisition last year of DreamWorks Animation in Glendale, NBCUniversal picked up a 51% stake in Awesomeness TV, which has one of the top channels on Google's YouTube. NBC also was one of the founders of the online video site Hulu.

In the past, media companies have vacuumed up the smaller companies and tried to run them themselves. But the track record is mixed. Consider Time Warner Inc.'s disastrous merger with AOL and News Corp.'s \$580 million purchase of MySpace, which was soon overtaken by Facebook. Even Walt Disney Co., which has scored with such big bets as buying Pixar Animation and Marvel Entertainment, has struggled with digital properties, such as Maker Studios. "We don't know how to run these businesses and we should be humble enough to admit we have a lot to learn," Burke said. – **Los Angeles Times**

A "ransomware" cyberattack has shut down the Pennsylvania Senate Democrats' computer network for longer than expected. Senate Democratic leader Jay Costa said Wednesday the situation is more complex than originally thought, and it's not clear when it will be resolved. The FBI is investigating and Microsoft is working to figure out how the network was penetrated and rebuild it.

Costa isn't discussing the nature of the ransom demand, but has said Democrats aren't willing to pay it. Staff aides discovered last Friday that the network had been shut down. Microsoft is providing laptops to restore access to email, but data and documents are still inaccessible. A ransomware attack is typically aimed at stealing sensitive information in an attempt to be paid for the data's return, often in a digital currency. – **Associated Press**

