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TDS Telecom announced that it started works to expand and improve broadband to 1,500 locations in central Pennsylvania. TDS Telecom (TDS) began work in February in portions of Schuylkill, Northumberland and Dauphin counties. Construction is expected to be done in summer 2018. TDS obtained **USD 75.1 million** in January from the FCC's A-CAM, under the Connect America Fund (CAF), to expand broadband access in 25 states.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocated USD 1 million to reach residents in some of the hardest to serve areas in Pennsylvania. The funding will also be used to maintain a voice and broadband network as well as building out to these locations. The FCC's Alternative Connect America Cost Model (A-CAM) will provide funding to 1,500 locations in central Pennsylvania with hundreds of additional customers to receive benefits from the network upgrade work. Depending on location, most TDS customers in eligible rural areas will receive guaranteed broadband speeds of 25/3 Mbps. Under the agreement with the FCC, the remaining customers will receive broadband service at lower speeds of 10/1 and 4/1Mbps. – *telecompaper.com*



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The Federal Communications Commission has proposed letting phone companies block more spam and "robocalls" and is hoping to deter scammers with big fines, The Associated Press reported. Over the past year, prodded by the government, cellphones have added new tools to counteract robocalls. Federal and state "Do Not Call" lists are supposed to protect people from unwanted calls from telemarketers.

Scammers are able to reach people using "autodialers," which generate a large number of calls automatically. It's estimated that Americans receive tens of millions of robocalls every day.

Her name is Heather. All of us in the office here know her. In fact, we know her too well. Heather calls each of our cellphones on a regular basis.

"Hi, this is Heather. ..." Who wouldn't want to talk to Heather? She sounds so pleasant and enthusiastic. She then proceeds to offer some special credit card deal with interest rates set by Lucky Luciano. Heather is cunning and mercurial. She always calls from a different number. You're never really sure it's her.

Message
From HBO
Offering
\$250,000
'Bounty
Payment'

Philadelphia
Inquirer
Pa. House
leader
signals
budget
impasse
likely to
linger

"Hmmm. I'm in the middle of something and don't know anyone in Tucson, but I'd better answer anyway. What if it's an emergency? Maybe it's about my prescription? What if it's some uncle I've never heard of offering to write me into his will?"

"Hi, this is Heather." Ugh. Yes, we loathe Heather.

Heather isn't real. She's a robocall generated by some unknown entity from who knows where. And we can't stop her. So, to any effort by the FCC to snuff out Heather and her ilk, we say, "Bravo!" As the AP reported, cracking down on "spoofed" numbers, such as those used by Heather, would make running a scam more difficult and save U.S. consumers millions of dollars, a group of state attorneys general said in an FCC filing.

It is true that federal and state "Do Not Call" lists have greatly reduced the number of unwanted calls. But clearly, some autodialing outfits have found a way around the barriers. They've also figured out a way to use local numbers so you think it's a co-worker or maybe your child's school calling. Say what you want about Heather. She might be diabolical, but she's not dumb.

Phone companies are able to screen some calls from bogus numbers, and apps now available can block some unwanted calls. And the FCC has proposed rules that would give more latitude to phone carriers to block suspicious numbers. All of these measures help, but more needs to be done. Mainly because not only are calls from Heather and her friends annoying, they can be dangerous to an unsuspecting party on the other end.

A recent U.S. Federal Trade Commission report indicated that scam artists are ramping up their efforts via phone to bilk people out of their hard-earned money. Fraudsters pretend to be from the IRS or some other government entity, or they say they're from a debt collection agency and claim you owe them money. Your computer has been infected with a virus and we can tell you how to protect yourself. The list goes on.

There were, according to the FTC report, nearly 1.3 million fraud-related complaints reported last year, up about 2 percent from 2015. Most people said they were scammed during a phone call. Some commonsense safeguards for all of us and seniors in particular: Don't answer the phone if you don't recognize the number. If it's important and real, they'll leave a message. If it is a robocall, or just an unwanted call from a real person, hang up. Don't press any buttons or engage. And most important, don't divulge any personal information.

These are things you've heard before, but they are worth repeating. You can also file a "Do Not Call" complaint with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office at bit.ly/DoNotCallComplaintForm. We hope the proposed FCC measures are enacted because they will make a difference.

"Americans have run out of patience with robocalls that ring at all hours of the day," Maureen Mahoney, policy analyst with Consumers Union, the policy arm of Consumer Reports, said in a statement. "This proposal is a positive step that will help provide relief from the scourge of unwanted calls. But consumers have waited long enough for action." Yes, we have. And we will wait a little longer.

In the meantime, if Heather calls, we're not here. – *Lancaster Intelligencer* editorial

