

# THE JOURNAL RECORD

**Streuli: Roger that**

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It's not often that the best interests of public agencies, rural Oklahoma and corporate America are the same. Try to name one. Go ahead. I'm waiting. Tick tock, tick tock ... got one yet? I didn't think so.

But there's one issue quietly bouncing around the airwaves that has the good people of Beaver County, Oklahoma County Sheriff John Whetsel and U.S. Cellular CEO John Rooney donning the same uniforms, even if they haven't yet figured out they're on the same team.

They all have an interest in getting some towers up in rural Oklahoma and that possibility took a hit last week. There is no statewide radio communication system. That means law enforcement officers in some parts of the state can't talk to their colleagues in other parts of the state at the most critical times.

U.S. Cellular has built its business in large part around providing cellular telephone service in rural areas. The company does business in Oklahoma, but like other cell companies, hasn't built towers to serve every corner of the state. Sheriff Whetsel thinks there's a benefit to law enforcement agencies being able to communicate with one another throughout the state. Rooney thinks folks in places like Beaver County ought to be able to use a cell phone, and maybe even to use it to call for emergency help.

The problem, of course, is money. Towers are expensive. Last week the federal government proposed capping the amount raised by the Universal Service Fee that we all pay on our cell phones. That money goes to subsidizing things like building cell towers in rural parts of Oklahoma, where the company doing the building couldn't possibly have enough customers to justify the investment. The same program provides about \$3 billion per year to subsidize old-fashioned telephone service, the kind with wires, in rural areas, ostensibly for the same reason: no private company could justify making the investment in the infrastructure because there would be no reasonable return on the investment.

Nobody likes wasteful government spending. But building infrastructure for communications isn't exactly wasteful. Cell phones can't be classified as a luxury anymore and I would like to know that emergency service personnel can communicate with one another.

Legislators seem to have the idea that we'll be more inclined to re-elect them if they give back the \$60 we weren't really missing in the first place than if they ensure our police department can talk to yours.

So here's my solution: Take that \$60 rebate you got and go buy a CB radio. You remember those don't you, good buddy?

That's an archaic means of communication, you say? An absurd idea? Of course it is. In precisely the same way land-line telephones will be in the near future.

I'm willing to keep paying a couple of bucks a month for the Universal Service Fee and I'm willing to let the state keep the \$60 I already paid if it means Oklahoma's communications systems – and I mean all of them – can catch up to the 21st century while we're still in it.

10-4, good buddy?