

## AT&T may pull the plug on some DSL customers

by Elizabeth Douglass  
Los Angeles Times  
March 27, 2001

More than 100,000 customers surfing the Internet through high-speed phone lines may be disconnected from their service this week after AT&T Corp. decided not to pick them up when it bought bankrupt NorthPoint Communications' equipment and network.

The deal, struck in bankruptcy court late last week, has sent the affected consumers - and their Internet service providers - scrambling to line up new carriers for their digital subscriber line service, or DSL.

DSL, a service typically offered by phone companies in partnership with Internet service providers, carries data signals over standard copper phone lines at speeds up to 25 times faster than a typical dial-up modem.

More than 20 Internet service providers nationwide provide DSL service to customers using NorthPoint's network, including Telocity, MSN.net, MegaPath, XO Communications, InternetConnect, Verio and others.

The group of ISPs is trying to head off mass customer disconnections by raising the money to fund NorthPoint's DSL operations until customers can be switched to another network.

"That means new Internet addresses, it means new stationary, new paper, and possibly changes to your own Web site."

-Peter Meade, president of  
TeleResearch Inc., a DSL consulting  
firm based in Carlsbad, Calif.

NorthPoint has said it needs \$2.4 million per month to keep its network running.

"We are working diligently and around the clock to have the bankruptcy of NorthPoint have as little impact on our customers as possible," said Ned Hayes, chief financial officer at Telocity, which uses DSL connections from NorthPoint, as well as from rivals Rhythms NetConnections, Pacific Bell and other companies.

The bankruptcy judge, along with NorthPoint's bankers, could decide Wednesday whether the ISP funding is sufficient to stave off the network shutdown for at least 30 days.

Meanwhile, Internet providers are warning customers that the NorthPoint's network shutdown is "imminent," and that their high-speed connection could be lost. Several compa-

nies have offered compensation and instructed customers to set up standard dial-up accounts to use while they work to find replacement providers.

AT&T did not elaborate on its reasons for not absorbing NorthPoint's customers.

"This is the deal that made the best sense for us and our needs," said Mark Siegel, an AT&T spokesman. "We understand that there are some issues remaining for NorthPoint and its customers ... and that it's a difficult time for both, but it's something that only NorthPoint can resolve."

Industry analysts believe AT&T wants to avoid having to offer DSL service at the prices and terms set by NorthPoint, especially since the company prefers to sell services in a bundle that includes long-distance phone service. In addition, since AT&T has its

own Internet service provider, the company is probably reluctant to act as a wholesaler to competing ISPs like MSN and Telocity, according to Dave Burstein, editor of the industry newsletter, DSL Prime.

For many customers, the lost service comes after months-long waits for installation, and after paying a hefty price for a special DSL modem. In most cases, the DSL modem sold for use with NorthPoint's network cannot be used with rival carrier's equipment - which could force customers to buy yet another modem.

About 60 percent of the affected customers are small- and medium-sized companies, for whom the high-speed connection has quickly become an integral part of their business. In many cases, replacement DSL service will cost more and could take several weeks to establish - if it's available at all.

"The bottom line is that businesses cannot do without broadband high-speed Internet access, and if you're all of the sudden without it, you have to find a way immediately to get it again," said Peter Meade, president of TeleResearch Inc., a DSL consulting firm based in Carlsbad, Calif.

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## Four dead, dozens hurt as bombs go off in Israel

by Tracy Wilkinson  
Los Angeles Times  
March 28, 2001

JERUSALEM, March 28 - Three terrorist bombings in less than 24 hours left four people dead and dozens of Israelis injured Tuesday and early Wednesday, while Jews and Palestinians clashed in the volatile city of Hebron, inflaming tensions to the breaking point.

With Israelis almost universally proclaiming that their patience has run out, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon came under increased pressure to strike back hard at Palestinian militants who the army said also shot and killed a 10-month-old Jewish girl Monday.

"We simply have to chop off these murderous arms and to hit at those who come to strike at us and at those who send them," Education Minister Limor Livnat said, voicing a sentiment heard from the streets to the halls of government.

In addition to two bombings Tuesday in Jerusalem, an apparent suicide bomber early this morning killed himself and two Israelis at a gas station between the West Bank town of Kalkilya and the central Israeli city of Petah Tikva, Israeli television reported. Up to seven Israelis were reportedly wounded. Police said they also defused a bomb in a downtown market in the coastal city of Netanya Wednesday morning.

## Rough times ahead for welfare recipients?

by Charles Babington  
The Washington Post  
March 28, 2001

WASHINGTON - Since Congress and President Clinton ended "welfare as we know it" in 1996, hundreds of thousands of Americans have moved from the dole into jobs. Some politicians, in fact, have declared welfare reform an unqualified success.

But rough times could lie ahead for many low-wage workers because of changes in the welfare law that drew little attention during the recent go-go economy. If the current economic slowdown continues and drives unemployment up, many thousands of low-income workers could fall back into a federal welfare system that now cuts off individuals after five years and limits payments to states no matter how many poor residents they have.

Moreover, some analysts say, the sharp drop in welfare caseloads may result more from the robust economy (unemployment recently hit a 30-year low) than from the 1996 law's celebrated "welfare-to-work" programs. And what a strong economy gives, they say, a weak economy can take away.

Welfare reform "was implemented during a period of extraordinary economic growth," which "led to a decline in caseload" and overall spending, says a recent report by the bipartisan Congressional Research Service. The new system "has yet to be tested by a recession."

That test could come soon. The Economic Cycle Research Institute, among other groups, says a recession is likely this year. But even a less dramatic, gradual-yet-steady loss of jobs could result in a substantially bleaker welfare picture.

"In an era when jobs may not be so plentiful as they currently are, the 'safety net' available to those who cannot find jobs may have some significant gaps in it," Harry Holzer, a Georgetown University public policy professor, wrote in December.

People with marginal skills and modest job experience often are among the first workers let go when times get tough. Therefore, said Holzer, a former chief economist for the Labor Department, "recent estimates suggest that the welfare rolls will rise by 5 to 7 percent for each percentage-point increase in the national unemployment rate."

If the unemployment rate, now 4.2 percent, should return to the 7.1 percent level of eight years ago (when the nation was pulling out of the last recession), that could mean a 15 to 20 percent rise in welfare cases - or roughly 400,000 new families on public assistance.

Such gloomy talk may seem anachronistic to those who feel the welfare reform act of 1996 wiped away the welfare system's least savory aspects. But some economists contend the nation has a false sense of well-being because the strong economy has delayed the law's full impact.

"Welfare reform ... would have been a disaster in the absence of the surge in demand for low-wage labor," Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute said in a recent speech to the National Urban League. "Now that the economy appears to be slowing, many of us who have tracked the impact of welfare reform are thinking, and worrying, about how the program will fare in a recession."

Two new aspects of the law, he said, could prove especially worrisome: A 60-month lifetime benefit limit for individuals; and capped federal payments to the states, even those that

might eventually see welfare rolls soar.

Congress approved the 60-month limit in response to complaints that too many Americans saw welfare as a way of life. In most states, individuals who have failed to find jobs even in the recently strong economy could begin hitting the cutoff sometime next year.

Some states opted for faster cutoffs of welfare. Indiana, for example, allows a person a lifetime total of 24 months of welfare benefits. The curtain began falling in July 1997, and thus far 14,300 families have hit the cutoff, said James Hmurovich, director of Indiana's Division of Family and Children. Of those, 129 received extensions, which the federal law allows for up to 20 percent of all welfare families.

The new law also changed welfare from an open-ended "entitlement" program to a block-grant system of fixed payments to states. It gave the states considerable leeway to use the money for cash assistance, job-training programs, child care, transportation aid and other purposes.

But the new law won't provide extra funds to the states when welfare roles start to rise. That means states eventually may have to shift money from worker-assistance programs into direct cash payments to newly unemployed poor people.

Even if former welfare recipients temporarily lose their jobs, they will be well served by the job-training programs established under the 1996 law, Bush administration officials say.

"The important thing to know is that former welfare recipients will be better positioned to weather an economic downturn," said Tony Jewell, spokesman for Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. "People who have been trained to work and have found work thanks to welfare reform or their own initiative are better positioned to find a new job, should they lose a job for any reason."

## New DNA testing urged in case of executed man

by Brooke A. Masters  
The Washington Post  
March 28, 2001

GRUNDY, Va. - As Roger Keith Coleman was strapped into Virginia's electric chair in 1992, he proclaimed his innocence and said Americans would rethink their support for the death penalty if they knew the truth.

Tuesday, four newspapers and a New Jersey charity asked a Buchanan County judge to allow them to test whether Coleman was right. The papers and charity asked for the evidence left over from the 1981 rape and murder of Coleman's sister-in-law, Wanda McCoy, so they could perform DNA analysis.

"The people of this commonwealth have an important interest in knowing that our system functioned properly and resulted in a guilty verdict for a guilty man or that ... it somehow failed and executed an innocent man," said Margaret Stone, the Radford, Va., lawyer representing The Washington Post and the other newspapers. "It's historical evidence that could be so important to our current debate on the death penalty."

But state Senior Assistant Attorney General Katherine Baldwin told Circuit Court Judge K.R. Williams that neither

the media nor the charity, Centurion Ministries, had standing to ask for testing. "Continual reexamination of concluded cases brings about perpetual uncertainty ... and disparages the entire criminal justice system," she said.

Tuesday's hearing comes at a time of growing national consensus that inmates who maintain their innocence should have access to DNA testing. The Virginia legislature this year passed a bill that would make such tests available, and Congress is considering providing that protection nationwide.

Although about 95 people have been freed from death row nationwide since the death penalty was restored in the 1970s, no one has ever been proven innocent after execution. Williams would be only the second judge to order DNA tests in such a case. Tests performed last year on the material left over from the case of Ellis Wayne Felker in Georgia have been inconclusive. Virginia judges have rejected similar requests in the capital cases of Joseph R. O'Dell and Derek R. Barnabei.

DNA tests recently exonerated Florida inmate Frank Lee Smith, 11 months after he died of natural causes while awaiting execution. At Tuesday's hearing, both sides noted that the Coleman case has roiled Virginia for years. Coleman, who lived and worked

as a coal miner in this small Southwest Virginia town, was convicted of raping and killing McCoy based largely on hair evidence and a jailhouse informer. But he said he had an alibi, and his claims of innocence drew national attention, including a cover story in Time magazine a week before his execution.

In 1990, Williams' predecessor ordered an early version of DNA testing as part of the appeals process. That lab work found that a genetic marker found in McCoy's body matched Coleman and about 2 percent of the general population. But Paul Enzina, an attorney for Centurion, which investigates convictions it thinks are questionable, introduced an affidavit Tuesday from a new expert who said the particular DNA marker might be significantly more common in Grundy's homogeneous population.

Current DNA tests are significantly more exact. "This testing has the ability to tell us precisely who killed Wanda McCoy. The state should be interested in that," Enzina told the judge.

Coleman's uncle, Roger Lee Coleman, 59, said he hopes Williams will allow the lab work. "If he does, it'll change everything. All I can hope for is the truth."

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