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Residents came out to voice their complaints about Windstream internet service.

meeting.

Kittle explained that the purpose of this case is to accomplish two things – the first to provide customers with refunds, and the second to force Windstream to improve service throughout Alabama and Georgia.

Until a month ago, the consumer case was only open to Alabama Windstream customers. Now, Beckum Kittle Law wants to extend the reach of the case to Georgia, especially Northwest Georgia where Windstream has the largest clientele in the state.

According to Kittle, he began investigation into Windstream as a company three years ago when his daughter was unable to pull up the Internet to work on a school project after attempting to connect for three hours.

Kittle immediately began researching Windstream to not only learn more about the company, but to find out if his county in Alabama was alone in Internet connection difficulties.

During the meeting, Kittle provided the information he found on the

company, including previous investigations regarding a similar situation of subpar Internet speed.

Windstream is a Fortune 500 company based in Little Rock, Arkansas, with annual revenues of approximately \$6 billion. The company provides services to 8 million people in 21 states across the nation.

In 2014, the Georgia Governor's Office of Consumer Protection reached a \$600,000 settlement with Windstream concerning the company's false claims in advertisements and selling Internet speeds to customers that the company knew it could not complete its promise of a guaranteed Internet connection.

Following the settlement of 2014, the Federal Communications Commission conducted a broadband speed report study. During the study, the FCC found that on average, Windstream customers only received 78 percent of advertised Internet speeds during high volume time frames throughout the day, such as from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.

“You may be wondering

how a company like this has grown to be a \$6 billion company,” said Kittle. “They've accomplished this through a very defined business approach. This company targets and saturates rural areas. They have gone into rural areas, where other competition cannot easily get into.

“If you don't have competition, then they don't have any incentive to spend another dollar.”

Kittle added that another contributing factor to Windstream's ability to continue to provide substandard service without substantial repercussions is due to a clause within the terms and conditions of the customer contract. Under this clause, customers are prohibited from taking part in a class action lawsuit against the company.

“If you file under a class action, you can sign up any person in this room,” said Kittle. “From there, I could file a class action on behalf of every person who is a Windstream customer in the entire country. You file one complaint, you have one motion and ultimately have one trial, although it's probably three or four years later.

“You have one settlement that resolves everything. It's all in a nice, neat little package.

“The lawyers make millions of dollars. Customers, if you guys were part of a class action lawsuit, you'd probably get a \$50 credit on your next month's bill.”

Kittle continued that, while the clause may be viewed as a roadblock for the case, it has actually worked in the favor of the customers. Kittle, along with the other lawyers on the case, determined a work around for the clause by proceeding with single filed arbitration.

customers.

“We're going to work to get refunds for customers,” said Kittle. “We're going to work toward having Windstream improve the Internet infrastructure. I can't make any guarantee that says we're going to be able to accomplish that, though.

“But, this is what I think gives us the best opportunity to have some kind of change. I think that we're getting their

attention, though.”

Only current Windstream customers can file with this case, however, there will be no cost to any participants, regardless of the outcome for each individual filing.

For those who wish to participate in single file arbitration, visit www.beckumkittle.com.

AARP Smart Driver Class at Union County Senior Center

The AARP Smart Driver classroom course on Thursday, April 6th will be hosted by the Union County Senior Center located at 95 Senior Center Drive, Blairsville, GA. Sign in time is 8:30 a.m. The classroom course starts promptly at 9 a.m. ending at 4 p.m. Course fee is \$15 for AARP members and \$20 for non members. Registration is recommended to secure your place in the classroom. Telephone the instructor Rosemary Kerr at 706-745-7046. Please speak clearly when leaving your name and telephone number for call back confirmation. You will learn

defensive driving techniques, proven safety strategies, new traffic laws, rules of the road and new vehicle technology innovations. No test to pass or writing required.

The AARP Smart Driver Course is opened to licensed drivers of all ages. AARP is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all as we age. At the end of the course you will receive your AARP Smart Driving Certificate. You may also qualify for a multi-year discount on your automobile insurance as well as a reduction of points on your drivers license.

Union/Towns County Tea Party March 28th meeting

Are more government regulations necessary to save the planet?

For decades the Green Movement has claimed that Earth is threatened by the activity and even the existence of mankind. Green policies dictate that the noble response is relinquishing our liberties to “save” the planet from peril. The Union/Towns County Tea Party will screen the documentary film “BLUE” at their meeting on March 28th. This film challenges these Green philosophies, and explores issues like carbon emissions, climate change, over-population, natural resources, and unmasks the UN's Agenda 21 plan. BLUE casts a bold new

vision: that through greater freedom we can realize a fuller potential for our fellow man and this beautiful blue planet we call home.

The Union/Towns County Tea Party will meet on Tuesday, March 28th at the Union County Community Center. There are refreshments at 6:30, and the programs starts promptly at 7 p.m.

The Union/Towns County Tea Party is a non-partisan group dedicated to the principles of smaller government, lower taxes, increased liberty and personal responsibility. All events are free and the public is invited to attend. For more information call Pat Thibodeaux at 706-374-4134.