

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2504

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The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20536

Received & Inspected

AUG 01 / 2014

FCC Mail Room

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

The rural communities located in my Congressional District rely on broadband Internet access as a tool to build businesses, apply for jobs, enhance educational opportunities and connect to friends and relatives. With this in mind, I write to emphasize how important it is to ensure that the final details of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II) live up to its promise.

CAF II offers a tremendous opportunity to bring faster broadband connections to millions of Americans who wouldn't otherwise receive these benefits. Thanks to the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) well-publicized efforts, thousands of rural communities are now counting on CAF II. And because CAF II represents the final phase of Universal Service reform for these areas, the FCC's rules will effectively determine whether millions of rural residents have a broadband connection or not.

To the FCC's credit, the June 10 Further Notice of Proposed Rule-Making (FNPRM) identifies a number of constructive ideas that could help achieve the speedier network goals without exceeding the CAF II annual budget. Indeed, the FNPRM has also raised hopes further by more than doubling the promised download speeds from 4 Mbps to 10 Mbps. However, I am concerned that if the FCC more than doubles the speed requirements without allowing the appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II, the program's overall mission could be endangered.

The CAF II funding period must be extended from the current 5 years to 10 years in order to allow adequate time for the construction of the higher-capacity network. Further, the FCC also must establish network build-out parameters consistent with the goal of providing quality broadband service to as many people as possible within CAF's limited funding framework. As such, providers must be given the flexibility to substitute extremely high-cost locations with unserved locations in partially-served census blocks.

Despite the FCC's efforts to overcome the digital divide, I still often hear from constituents seeking assistance to bring broadband service to their homes. The concerns they raise are a reminder of how challenging rural broadband policy can be, but also how important it is. Thank you for considering my concerns, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vicky Hartzler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vicky" and last name "Hartzler" clearly distinguishable.

Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress