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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2508

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As you know rural communities, like the 8th Congressional District of Missouri I represent, need access to affordable high speed broadband internet. Businesses use the broadband Internet to grow and expand. It helps the unemployed apply for jobs. It encourages students and teachers enhance educational opportunities. Broadband internet connects friends and families. Because of all these things and more, it is vitally important the final details of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II) fulfill the promise made to rural Americans.

CAF II offers a tremendous opportunity to bring speedier broadband internet connections to millions of Americans who wouldn't otherwise receive these benefits. The Commission's efforts are the reason why so many rural communities are now counting on CAF II. And because CAF II represents the final phase of Universal Service reform for these areas, its rules will effectively determine, for years to come, whether millions of rural residents will have a broadband connection or not.

The Commission's June 10 Further Notice of Proposed Rule-Making (FNPRM) identified a number of constructive ideas that could help achieve 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 Commission's 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.

In addition to the issue of speeds, 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 Commission 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.

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Despite the many years to bridge the broadband Internet divide, I hear more often than not from constituents seeking assistance to bring broadband service to their homes or businesses. 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 the concerns of residents of rural Missouri. I look forward to continue working with you on this and other important issues.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Smith', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JASON T. SMITH
Member of Congress