

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2207

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FCC Mail Room

August 13, 2014

Mr. Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

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Dear Chairman Wheeler:

On behalf of my constituents in the 7th Congressional District of Michigan, I respectfully urge the FCC take appropriate steps to ensure Connect America Fund ("CAF") Phase II is allocated in a manner to guarantee its goals of providing broadband service to the most rural parts of our country. Whether it is a non-traditional option, like the rural electric cooperative that serves much of my district, or a price cap or rate-of-return carrier, a publicly-driven, open and competitive process will yield the best solution for rural Americans currently on the wrong side of our nation's digital divide. Broadband has quickly become a necessity of life for rural America, and is essential for the continued growth, productivity and economic competitiveness for many of the communities I represent. As such the current gaps in rural broadband access must be addressed and warrant the FCC's consideration of new options that encourage competition and result in meaningful solutions.

As you are aware, in response to the rural trials set forth in your January 31, 2014 Order, more than 1,000 expressions of interest were filed with the FCC providing ideas and solutions to the issue of broadband coverage in un-served and underserved parts of rural America. I believe this response signifies a market interest that bodes well for rural America and I look forward to seeing the results of the Rural Experiments this fall.

As the FCC moves forward with CAF Phase II, I encourage you to deliberate thoughtfully to ensure the goals of CAF are realized. Due to the significant funds behind this initiative it is imperative that we get this right. If the goal of CAF is to promote access to robust broadband infrastructure, we must take steps to incent those platforms and those entities possessing both the appetite and ability to deploy meaningful network solutions in the rural space. For example, with the infrastructure and billing relationships already in place, allowing electric coops to compete for CAF Phase II funding would help increase competition and encourage more affordable pricing and improved broadband access for rural consumers.

The next five years has the potential of closing a digital divide that now limits opportunities for much of my district. From agriculture to education, job opportunities to simple daily tasks, next-generation broadband is as essential in rural areas as it is to the rest of the country. I urge the FCC to stay the current course implemented in the Rural Experiments and allow all interested parties to compete to bring robust broadband to rural areas. The CAF disbursement process must encourage universal access, competition, public input and a robust broadband solution for rural America.

Sincerely,



TIM WALBERG
Member of Congress