

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 8, 2014

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Thank you for meeting with us in July. We thoroughly appreciated the opportunity to discuss communications issues facing Montana. We look forward to continuing our dialogue on issues such as rural call blocking, E-rate modernization and high cost loop support. While each of those issues remains important, we write today to share our thoughts on Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II).


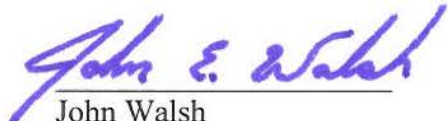
The importance of reliable access to broadband Internet for rural communities continues to grow. With robust broadband service, the smallest town can compete and connect with the rest of the world. The Internet is a critical tool to build businesses, apply for jobs, enhance educational opportunities and connect friends and families. CAF II is an outstanding opportunity to continue to improve access to high-speed broadband for Montanans living in unserved areas, especially since it incentivizes broadband deployment at speeds of 10 Mbps, more than double speeds of previous rounds.

It is essential that the final details of the program live up to its promise. While more than doubling the speed requirements for CAF II is welcome news, we are concerned that the program's overall mission could be endangered if the final rules do not ensure that eligible census blocks are correctly identified, partially unserved census blocks can receive funding and an appropriate amount of time and support are granted to make sure carriers can construct high-capacity networks.

As CAF II procedures are finalized, we urge the Commission to meticulously survey census blocks to make sure that all eligible unserved areas qualify for funding. Additionally, CAF II eligibility must be updated to account for partially-served census blocks as too many households missed out on CAF 1.2 funding due to the insufficient challenge process. Finally, the Commission should continue to be open to feedback about how best to balance the need to quickly develop broadband capacity in unserved areas with the funding and time required to complete build outs.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and the Commission on efforts to deploy broadband to the most rural areas of our nation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jon Tester  
United States Senator  
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John Walsh  
United States Senator