

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 24, 2014
Received & Inspected

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The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

FCC Mail Room

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Broadband Internet access has become an essential part of the economic and social fabric in many rural communities. It is a tool increasingly used to build businesses, apply for jobs, enhance educational opportunities, and connect to friends and relatives. Without it, the same communities risk being left behind in today's technology-centric economy.

Phase II of the Connect America Fund ("CAF II") offers a tremendous opportunity to bring advanced, fiber-fed broadband connections to Americans in rural areas. Indeed, the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) released on June 10, 2014, builds upon this promise by significantly increasing the target download speeds in the 2011 USF/ICC Transformation Order from 4/1 Mbps to 10/1 Mbps over a five-year period after construction begins.

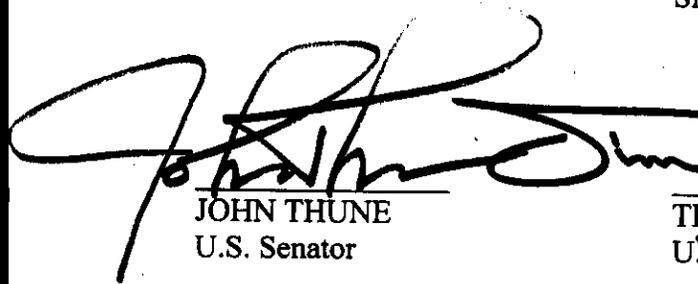
We are writing today to emphasize the importance of making sure the final details of CAF II live up to its promise to spur the development of broadband in unserved areas. We are concerned the program's overall mission could be endangered if the Commission significantly increases the speed requirements without allowing an appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II. To the Commission's credit, the June 10 FNPRM identifies a number of constructive ideas that could help achieve the goals for faster network speeds without exceeding the CAF II budget. These proposals, including extending the term of support and providing flexibility to recipients, could help advance the Commission's goal of bringing 10/1 Mbps to rural America. We hope you will fully consider these ideas.

We also encourage you to be as precise as possible when targeting support to areas where broadband would not otherwise be available. Now that we are in the final phase of developing CAF II, we hope the FCC will collect targeted, accurate data on existing service areas to ensure that all unserved customers have access to broadband. Furthermore, it is important that this effort protect the interests of existing providers from overbuilding.

Despite years of federal efforts to overcome the digital divide, many South Dakotans still lack access to advanced broadband service to their homes. This persistent reality is a reminder of how challenging it can be to design effective rural broadband policy, but also how important it is.

Thank you for considering our concerns, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
U.S. Senator



TIM JOHNSON
U.S. Senator



KRISTI NOEM
U.S. Representative