

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20554

1079

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Broadband Internet access has become an essential part of the economic and social fabric in many rural communities, as a tool to build businesses, apply for jobs, enhance educational opportunities, and connect to friends and relatives. While our nation has made great strides in expanding broadband infrastructure, one-third of rural Americans still do not have home access to broadband Internet. This not only affects our constituents seeking a job or starting their own business, but also students that are looking to get ahead in their education and patients using tele-health services.

Phase II of the Connect America Fund (“CAF II”) offers an opportunity to bring broadband connections to millions of Americans in rural communities – including many throughout Wisconsin - who wouldn’t otherwise benefit from this access. CAF II also represents the final phase of Universal Service reform for many rural areas, and its rules will effectively determine, for years to come, the level of rural connectivity and the quality of broadband access. This includes the ambitious goal of more than doubling promised download speeds from 4 Mbps to 10 Mbps.

If the Commission advances new requirements without allowing the appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II, however, it may fall short of the program’s overall mission. First, the CAF II funding period should be extended from the current 5 years to 10 years to allow adequate time for the construction of the higher-capacity network. Next, the Commission should use the same 10 Mbps standard when identifying broadband availability from competitors, or else communities with just 4 Mbps will be left behind. Finally, providers should be given flexibility to substitute high cost locations with unserved locations in partially served areas, to better reach as many people as possible within CAF’s limited funding framework.

Access to broadband Internet service is no longer a luxury for rural America – it is a necessity. Despite years of federal efforts to overcome the digital divide, more work needs to be done. These policy reforms to CAF II will help achieve this goal and will maximize CAF II funding.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to increase broadband access in rural America. We ask that you provide a response with your views on these proposals by October 22nd.

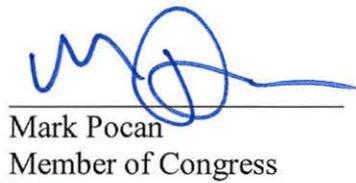
Sincerely,



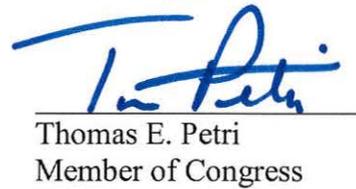
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