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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2014

TODD ROKITA
4TH DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

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Hon. Tom Wheeler, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

The FCC's efforts to design and implement reforms to the Universal Service Fund (USF), if executed correctly, will be the key to ensuring every American receives high speed broadband and remains served over time.

A mechanism for distributing USF support for robust broadband networks is still needed for areas traditionally served by small, independent rural telcos. These small businesses have already deployed broadband to over 90% of their rate-of-return rural service areas with support from a program tied to voice telephony that requires consumers to purchase voice service in order to receive affordable broadband. It is past time for these small carriers to be supported by a program designed for 21st century telecommunications, and rural investment will be stifled as long as the wait continues.

In rural areas traditionally served by larger price cap carriers, I commend the FCC's efforts to ensure that Connect America Fund (CAF) support is used efficiently and effectively, and recognize the complexities of this effort. Deploying broadband networks using outdated speeds will only serve to increase the digital divide, but higher speeds require greater levels of investment and more time to complete the additional construction required. If the minimum broadband speed associated with CAF Phase II funding is increased, I urge the commission to provide the necessary resources through CAF for providers to deliver faster speeds.

In my district, Endeavor Communications has submitted an Expression of Interest to the FCC regarding its Broadband Experiments program as it seeks to edge out beyond the rate-of-return areas where it has provided rural telecom solutions for many years. It would be wasteful for CAF II funds to be made available in areas in which broadband experiment projects are funded, if such funding decisions are made prior to the state-level election. On the other hand, consumers should not bear the risk of losing CAF II funding, and thus the opportunity for new or improved broadband service, based on mere proposals in the broadband experiment program.

Without these changes to promote investment in all rural areas, rural America won't fully experience the educational opportunities, employment prospects, and advanced healthcare that broadband delivers to those fortunate enough to live in low cost, high population centers. I look forward to working with the Commission to bring broadband service to my constituents in rural America.

Sincerely,

Todd Rokita
Member of Congress

TR/tb