

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 11, 2015

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We write to request that you carefully consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands.

As you know, Section 254 of the Communications Act charges the Commission with ensuring that “Consumers in all regions of the Nation, including low-income consumers and those in rural, insular, and high cost areas” have access to telecommunications and information services “that are reasonably comparable” to those in urban areas. Yet too many New Mexicans living in rural areas continue to live on the wrong side of the digital divide. According to the Commission’s 2015 Broadband Progress Report, 77 percent of New Mexicans living in rural areas lack fixed broadband access, which compares to 8 percent of Americans living in urban areas and 17 percent of the U.S. population as a whole.

The broadband challenge for those living on Tribal lands is even more dire. In New Mexico, nearly 90 percent of those living on Tribal lands do not have access to fast broadband. Since broadband technologies can create opportunities for economic growth, education, and healthcare delivery, these appalling statistics do not adequately convey the negative impacts of this digital divide for Indian Country.

Our understanding is that the Commission is evaluating a proposal for a “Tribal Broadband Factor” to target support for broadband on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. This proposal would direct \$25 million annually for ten years from existing universal service funds to broadband deployment on Tribal lands. The proposal further includes benchmarks for deployment to hold broadband providers accountable for making progress toward tackling the digital divide.

As you have previously noted, universal service reform is a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to ensure greater broadband access. We therefore respectfully request that you carefully consider the proposal for a Tribal Broadband Factor to help direct universal service support to areas where it is most needed to end the digital divide.

Thank you for your consideration and reply.

Sincerely,



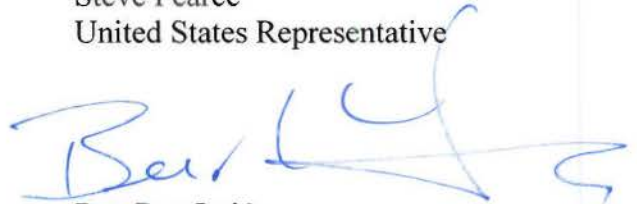
Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Steve Pearce
United States Representative



Ben Ray Luján
United States Representative



Michelle Lujan Grisham
United States Representative