

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 19, 2016

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We are writing to express interest in promoting the deployment of high-speed, long-term broadband networks in unserved rural areas in the State of Missouri. We understand that the Commission is currently considering rules for the reverse auction to be conducted this year under Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF Phase II). As part of the CAF II process, we understand that there will be almost \$400 million available for rural broadband across our state over the next ten years through this reverse auction. This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to invest in the future of rural Missouri, which will promote economic growth, improve access to education and health care, and improve the overall quality of life in areas that are currently unserved with broadband.

- We support rules for the reverse auction that would encourage both fiscal responsibility and the deployment of future-proof broadband networks in rural Missouri. The auction should be structured to welcome bids from all providers seeking to deploy in unserved areas, but it should also weight certain factors to ensure that the FCC allocates the funds to the best possible technologies. Higher speeds, long-term durability, scalability, and additional consumer benefits should count more heavily in favor of a particular bid over another. We urge the Commission to ensure that our rural citizens benefit from the best available technologies with scalability for the long term in the reverse auctions – not simply the lowest-cost network – for several reasons. First and foremost, it would ensure that consumers in rural areas have access to broadband services that are reasonably comparable in terms of both cost and quality to the kind of broadband services that are typically available in urban areas. This is consistent with the fundamental principles of Universal Service under the Communications Act, and it would provide equal opportunities to all Americans. Rural America should not be left behind with second-class broadband services.
- Second, it would promote investments in future-proof networks, rather than investments in other technologies that may become obsolete in the near term. That would conserve available funding, so that it isn't wasted on technologies that do not stand the test of time or rising customer expectations.
- Finally, it would enable broadband providers to fairly compete with each other to provide the best networks and services to the most unserved locations at the lowest cost. Like technologies would compete alike at auction to provide service to unserved areas, such that no one technology is unfairly disadvantaged for access to funding.

We are concerned that if the Commission structures the reverse auction so that the low cost is the primary consideration, it would unfairly give preference to low-cost, low-speed networks and effectively prevent the deployment of networks comparable to those deployed in urban areas.

Rural Missouri needs access to high-speed services that provide the capacity that is needed for attracting and retaining business in rural areas. These types of networks enable residential customers to work from

home and access to job growth opportunities. Educational improvements are enabled through truly high-speed networks in ways that slower speed technologies cannot, particularly to provide connections to schools and libraries. It provides the capacity that is needed for improved health care services, such as robotic surgery and other telehealth applications. It provides more reliable broadband services than wireless, particularly in areas that are subject to interference. Finally, high-speed broadband networks are being deployed affordably with tiers as low as \$39.95 and gigabit speeds for less than \$100/month (as well as 100 megabit per second upload and download symmetrical service for \$49.95 per month), even in areas of rural Missouri where customer density is as low as four customers per mile.

For all of these reasons, the Commission should design the reverse auction to promote opportunities for high-speed, future-proof broadband networks and services to access funding through the Connect America Fund, as described herein. This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to realize a vision of rural broadband that provides reasonably comparable services to all Americans, and which doesn't leave rural consumers behind.

Sincerely,



Billy Long
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress



Sam Graves
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver II
Member of Congress



Jason Smith
Member of Congress



Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress