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April 11, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Michael O’Rielly, and Mignon Clyburn
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai, Commissioner O’Rielly, and Commissioner Clyburn:

In years past, I have joined several of my colleagues in support of policies that seek to modernize federal broadband programs, such as the Universal Service Fund (USF), to ensure that the USF program was keeping up with the realities of living and working in a 21st century economy. Today, I write to you in that same vein and urge you to prioritize ensuring rural Americans not only have access to reliable high-speed broadband, but that small rural providers can offer this critical tool at rates that make sense for their consumers.

Iowa’s local telephone companies are a critical component to lessening the digital divide. As new leadership takes over the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and as transition continues from the traditional USF High-Cost model into the Connect America Fund (CAF), it is important that these changes still make it possible for the FCC and rural providers to comply with longstanding universal service provisions outlined in statute.

It has been brought to my attention that the March 2016 Order, that was intended to improve access to affordable “standalone broadband” for rural consumers, has still left outstanding challenges for operators wanting to provide this service. As Chairman of the Agriculture Subcommittee on Rural Development and Energy, I care deeply about ensuring rural America has access to high broadband speeds so our small business owners and start-ups can grow and that advances in healthcare services and precision agriculture can continue.

In light of these concerns, I ask that you continue to work on the CAF so it can provide the reliable support necessary to aid our rural providers in expanding important broadband services. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to working with you on this important issue in the future.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

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