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United States Senate

July 28, 2017

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Chairman Pai, Commissioner Clyburn, and Commissioner O'Rielly:

I want to thank you for your continued hard work to expand broadband access, specifically in rural areas. Broadband removes geography as a barrier, connecting rural populations to more services and information. Teachers in small towns can now access more educational materials, farmers can better plan for future weather and market events, and rural hospitals can connect to patients in new ways. However, there are still many steps we need to take before rural America can truly be considered ‘connected.’

In light of this, I would like to bring your attention to a letter I sent to the Commission on December 18, 2015, and the response received from then-Chairman Wheeler on March 1, 2016. In my letter I highlighted how important broadband is to the delivery of modern healthcare and the important role telemedicine plays in expanding access to affordable healthcare in rural Montana. I also noted that the current Universal Service programs do not support internal connections in healthcare institutions. Internal wireless connections help expand options for rural care providers and for the patients they serve.

It is my understanding from former Chairman Wheeler and from recent actions at the Commission that there are ongoing petitions and rulemakings that could address the concerns laid out in this and my previous letter. If current proceedings do have the ability to examine or incorporate a rule change, I would request an update on their status. If, on the other hand, there are no current proceedings, I would encourage the current Commission to initiate a proceeding to examine a rule change to add wireless internal connections as an option of the Universal Service rural healthcare program. I maintain that a small change in the Commission’s rules can make a big difference in rural America.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator