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Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
CHAIRMAN
CYBERSECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE
PROTECTION

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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FCC Mail Room

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to request that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) take action to address the budget shortfall in certain parts of the High-Cost Universal Service Fund (USF). This lack of sufficient funding puts the rural communities that I represent at a significant disadvantage.

The annual budget instructions through which the High-Cost USF is funded have not been fully utilized since their implementation in 2011. Despite the appearance of surplus funds in the overall budget in prior years, the smaller operators that benefit from High-Cost USF programs in my district have been subject to strict and separate budget caps that limit broadband infrastructure investments in nearly 40 percent of rural America.

Pending comprehensive FCC review or adjustment of the High-Cost USF budget instructions, I urge you to maintain level collections from telecommunications companies into the future. To the extent that the collected sum exceeds High-Cost USF spending obligations at the time, the FCC should directly apply funds to help mitigate or neutralize the budget constraints applied to these smaller, rural operators.

While it is currently unclear how funds that exceed High-Cost USF spending may be obligated under existing budget instructions, their continued collection has the potential to help provide rural communities with comparable broadband services for comparable rates relative to urban areas. In doing so, the country will move closer to the fund's stated mission to provide all Americans with "accessible, affordable, and pervasive high-speed connectivity."

As always, I thank you for considering my request. I look forward to working with you, and the other commissioners, to ensure that the "digital divide" does not exclude millions of rural Americans from the services that they, and our economy, depend on.

Sincerely,



John Ratcliffe
Member of Congress