

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2018

840

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

As Nebraska's congressional delegation, we encourage immediate action by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to restore sufficiency and predictability to the Universal Service Fund's (USF) High Cost program budget, as designed. A fully funded program ensures that rural Nebraskans have access to high quality broadband and voice services comparable to those available in urban areas.

The negative impacts of the insufficient and uncertain USF budget adversely affect providers from strategically investing in rural broadband, at a time when the federal government has made rural broadband a national priority. Therefore, we were pleased you testified at both Senate and House FCC Oversight hearings that you are committed to taking action by the end of the year.

The responses to the FCC's High Cost USF Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking confirm the need and widespread support for adequate long-term funding to smaller rural carriers, so that rural consumers can have access to high quality broadband. Consistent with prior letters from Congress expressing our concerns about USF budget shortfalls, we urge the Commission to establish a sufficient, predictable budget that will promote rural broadband availability and affordability, while recognizing the long-term nature of the deployed assets.

The High Cost USF program budget is essential for millions of rural Americans and foundational for the success of all four universal service initiatives in rural America. Yet, the High Cost program budget has remained frozen for many years. It is essential that the High Cost program evolves with technological developments and is set at a level proportionate with demand levels into the future.

In the State of Nebraska, the budget limit is estimated to cut support that carriers would otherwise have received for their deployment of broadband by more than \$4,207,000 over a twelve-month period. These reductions in support will require providers to postpone or cancel broadband investments, reducing the availability of rural broadband as they threaten to increase consumer broadband rates in rural areas. Rural carriers serve more than 55 percent of Nebraska's land mass, and it is crucial that these companies and their customers are not left behind.

Thank you for acknowledging the need to eliminate the digital divide by taking steps to ensure accessible broadband for rural American consumers and businesses by year's end. We look forward to working with you to achieve a robust solution on this critical issue for rural America.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer  
United States Senator



Ben Sasse  
United States Senator



Don Bacon  
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry  
Member of Congress



Adrian Smith  
Member of Congress