

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2018

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The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express our support for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to act this year to restore greater sufficiency and predictability to the Universal Service Fund (USF) High Cost program. Specifically, we request that the FCC fully fund the High Cost program to ensure that rural North Dakotans have access to high-quality, affordable broadband and voice services comparable to those available in urban areas.

The High Cost program is critical for millions of rural Americans and foundational for the success of all four universal service initiatives in rural America. Yet the USF budget has remained static at 2011 levels, largely reflective of basic telephone service. It is essential for all universal service programs to evolve and keep pace with technological advancements and current demand.

The static nature of the current budget is hindering rural broadband deployment and negatively affecting consumers. In the state of North Dakota, the insufficient budget is estimated to have cut support that carriers would have otherwise received for their deployment of broadband by more than \$14.5 million over a twelve month period. These reductions will require providers to postpone, and in some cases cancel, broadband investments, reducing the availability of rural broadband, and threaten to increase consumer broadband rates in rural areas. These reductions also put at risk the ability of providers to pay back loans for investments already made, undermining the viability and sustainability of broadband in rural areas. More than 96% of North Dakota's land mass is served by rural carriers and it is crucial that these companies and their customers not be left behind.

Given the negative impacts of an insufficient and uncertain USF budget on consumers and providers' ability to invest at a time when Congress has made rural broadband a national priority, we urge the FCC to act before the end of the year to put these programs on a path for success for the next decade and beyond.

Thank you for your actions taken thus far and for acknowledging the need to eliminate the digital divide by assuring affordable broadband for rural American consumers and businesses. We look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve a positive resolution on this important issue for rural America.

Sincerely,

  
JOHN HOEVEN  
U.S. Senator

  
HEIDI HEITKAMP  
U.S. Senator

  
KEVIN CRAMER  
U.S. Congressman