

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
JOINT ECONOMIC

May 1, 2019

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Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW, Room 8-C453
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I respectfully request the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Office of Native Affairs and Policy, and the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) host at least three in-person technical assistance workshops in New Mexico during this fiscal year's funding cycle. The purpose of the workshops should be to increase participation in federal broadband programs and improve internet access across the state's rural and tribal communities.

As you know, high-speed broadband is key to a thriving economy and a well-educated workforce, yet over half of rural communities in New Mexico lack such access, and the divide is even wider in tribal communities. Too many rural New Mexicans and Native Americans are without even basic access to the internet, and are missing critical economic development, educational, and tele-health opportunities. New Mexicans across the state could benefit greatly from the FCC and USAC's grant programs and services, but these resources are often inaccessible because information and program webinars are primarily available online.

Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a series of reports that found that the broadband data collected by the FCC overstated service in tribal communities, thereby limiting the FCC's, tribal stakeholders', and the federal government's abilities to target broadband funding to these areas. The FCC's actions were detrimental to my constituents and helped to exacerbate the lack of broadband funding in New Mexico. It is critically important the FCC immediately work to correct these deficiencies.

The GAO also found tribes face barriers to obtaining funds to improve access and less than 1 percent of FCC broadband funding went directly to tribes from 2010 to 2017. This exemplifies the need for further, more comprehensive technical assistance and engagement in New Mexico. These technical assistance workshops would also help to reduce the administrative burden the application process can place on some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country.

I know that you share my belief that the residents of New Mexico are entitled to enjoy the same access to the internet as the rest of the United States. I ask the FCC and USAC to commit to ensuring every tribal and rural community in New Mexico has an equitable opportunity to receive broadband funding.

We urgently need to invest the necessary resources so all of our children, no matter where they live or go to school, can access the internet and learn the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century. I look forward to working together to improve access to high-speed internet across the state of New Mexico. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', written over a horizontal line.

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator