

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2020

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

Dear Chairman Pai,

Thank you for offering the 2.5GHz Rural Tribal Window. Access to this unassigned spectrum is an unprecedented opportunity for tribes and tribal consortia from the Federal Communication Commission (FCC). Internet connectivity has become so engrained in our everyday lives that, despite the many places in our nation with unreliable, limited, or no broadband internet access, those from more connected locations often take it for granted. Many of the locations lacking connectivity are in the homes and communities of our nation's first people. For that reason and more, this opportunity is welcomed and much appreciated. Given the extenuating circumstances of the current COVID-19 pandemic, we are asking for an extension of the application deadline for qualified tribes and tribal consortia to ensure sufficient time and resources can be dedicated to submitting successful applications.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide, showing the importance of a fast, reliable internet connection to provide continuity of services while maintaining safe distances to slow the spread of COVID-19. The nation turned to the internet to provide many critical services including distance learning for students of all ages, health care through tele-health video sessions, in-person meetings through the now ubiquitous "Zoom", and to facilitate grocery store or restaurant for pick-up or delivery. In some communities, especially throughout Indian Country, many of these options are limited or non-existent due to poor connectivity. In a January 9, 2019 report, the Congressional Research Service found that tribal areas are more than five times less likely to have broadband than the general U.S. population.^[1]

While the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn more attention to the disparities of internet connectivity throughout the nation, it has not changed the barriers to connectivity in Indian Country, one of which is access to spectrum. The Rural Tribal Window is one of the few inexpensive solutions to the numerous barriers that can better connect our nation's tribal areas internally, as well as prepare them for future high-speed connections.

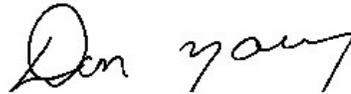
^[1] Congressional Research Service, Tribal Broadband: Status of Deployment and Federal Funding Programs, Updated January 9, 2019. Report number: R44416 <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44416>

We believe that an extension to the Rural Tribal Window application is necessary, and failing to provide an extension during this pandemic will undermine the very goal of the opportunity. As an important step to shrink the digital divide, access to spectrum is one of the essential broadband building blocks. We request an extension to the deadline to February 2021.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska



Martha McSally
United States Senator



Tom Cole
United States Congressman



Paul Cook
United States Congressman



Markwayne Mullin
United States Congressman

Cc:
Honorable Michael O'Rielly
Honorable Brendan Carr
Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Honorable Geoffrey Starks