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COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,
AND TECHNOLOGY

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2020

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The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai and Commissioners:

Thank you for the actions you and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC; “the Commission”) have already undertaken over the past several months to help Americans remain connected to vital internet and telecommunication services as we battle the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We have worked together to ensure financial and technical assistance is made available across the country – helping millions of students, countless health care professionals, and businesses of all sizes adjust to this unprecedented state of affairs.

The COVID-19 health crisis has focused our attention on the digital divide like never before; Americans from all professions shifted to at-home work or education, placing extreme strain on our service capabilities. Bridging this divide remains one of the most challenging yet important policy issues for Congress and the entire federal government to address. This problem is even more significant for Americans living in rural areas, as nearly one quarter of these citizens have limited – or nonexistent – access to high-speed broadband.

As a member of the House Agriculture and Small Business Committees, I have heard from countless family farmers who desperately need more robust, effective, and efficient deployment of rural broadband to their homes – which also serve as their business locations. Much of the country’s rural broadband infrastructure is built upon and supplied by utility poles; this makes the governance and costs over the placement or replacement of these poles vitally important to my constituents. The costs associated with these poles is also a significant issue for those providers seeking to push their broadband services to customers, as replacing a pole can comprise over one-third of the cost of expanding rural broadband.

As the FCC works to expand broadband services and capabilities to Americans across the nation, I ask the Commission to strongly consider a recent petition by the Internet and Television Association (NCTA). The petition, which was filed on July 16, 2020, requests the Commission clarify the costs of utility pole replacement in areas with no access to broadband. The petition specifically asks for a proportional and equitable split in costs between the pole owner and the entity attaching broadband communications equipment to said pole. A transparent, fair, and swift

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process for accessing utility poles would allow investments in rural broadband to reach more unserved homes and businesses – and at the rate we need during this uncertain year.

Once again, I greatly appreciate the work you and your team have provided to the nation during these extremely challenging times. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Stephen Reynolds in my office at Stephen.Reynolds@mail.house.gov if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "T. Balderson", written over a horizontal line.

Troy Balderson
Member of Congress