

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4605

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May 3, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Acting Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel,

I write today urging prioritization of rural communities in desperate need of broadband infrastructure. Specifically, I am very concerned by the great potential for inefficiencies wasted resources when dealing with broadband issues among the federal agencies.

As you know, two federal agencies currently provide the primary support for rural broadband network deployment through five programs: 1) the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), through its Universal Service Fund (USF) High Cost Program, and 2) the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service through Community Connect Grants, Farm Bill Broadband Loans, Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Guarantees, and ReConnect.

Section 6210 of the Agriculture Improvement Act dramatically alters and expands this landscape by involving additional RUS programs and two more USDA agencies: 1) the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and 2) the Rural Housing Service. Soon, the number of federal programs providing support for broadband network deployment will increase, significantly enhancing the ability to help facilitate broadband service in rural areas. Careful precision will be required to avoid duplication of efforts and waste of taxpayer dollars.

Ensuring that federal agencies like the USDA and FCC work in concert with each other and the state-based broadband programs will help avoid duplication among agencies and help deliver high-speed, reliable broadband to the consumer. Heightened coordination will also help recognize the harsh realities of operating in the most remote, sparsely populated areas of the nation. USDA has the resources to provide ample support for broadband network deployments through numerous programs. High Cost USF remains essential to supporting the ongoing operating costs of serving these areas that, oftentimes, average fewer than 10 people per square mile and provide no business case otherwise for deploying networks and delivering telecom services. Rural telecom networks are critical for key parts of our economy, including farmers and rural landowners.

I write to request several pieces of information, for which I look forward to your written response:

- 1) Current broadband maps are primarily based on information received from providers. What processes are in place to ensure the highest accuracy in reporting this information?
- 2) A more granular broadband map can help identify more accurately where broadband is available, but only if a meaningful and robust challenge process is implemented to validate both fixed and mobile data prior to any map being used by the FCC or RUS (or any other governmental agency) to make funding or financing decisions. What steps are being taken to ensure a challenge process is in place to help validate mapping data?

- 3) What is being done to help ensure proper mapping collaboration between federal agencies?
- 4) Certain federal broadband maps do not capture deployment in progress, even when it is occurring pursuant to governmental initiatives like the FCC's Universal Service Fund or Rural Utilities Service (RUS) lending/grant programs. When will the mapping be updated to incorporate ongoing deployment of broadband services?
- 5) Congress recently passed the Broadband DATA Act to address the accuracy and the challenge process issues noted above. What is the status of implementing the new map, and will the FCC and USDA consider utilizing the updated map to maximize coordination between your agencies?

I look forward to your response to these questions, and to working with you to ensure my constituents and others have dependable access to broadband networks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Good". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bob Good
Member of Congress