

Dear Colleague:

Millions of Americans lack access to a reliable internet connection. This digital divide between urban and rural households continues to set back millions of Americans in education, economic growth, agriculture, and telemedicine. This problem is especially acute in rural areas, where a 2017 report found that 30 percent of rural Americans (19 million people) lacked broadband access. It is time we view broadband as a necessity to prosper in today's world.

Just like the Rural Electrification Act brought electricity to all Americans, the *Universal Broadband Act* will help bring broadband access to everyone. The *Universal Broadband Act* will achieve this goal by expanding the Universal Service Fund (USF) contribution base to include broadband services, rather than the current outdated model that draws support solely from telephone services. The costs of building out service to areas without adequate broadband continues to rise, while the current base that contributes to the USF is declining. This has resulted in an increasingly growing contribution factor, overburdening those who are required to contribute.

The USF continues to be the primary method FCC uses to address broadband shortages. These funds are used by four pivotal programs to close the digital divide: the High Cost (Connect America), Schools and Libraries (E-rate), Low Income (Lifeline), and Rural Health Care programs. The *Universal Broadband Act* will stabilize their revenue stream, and implement important changes:

- Codify that broadband is within the definition of Universal Service;
- Require the FCC to set the contribution rate as needed to meet Universal Service goals and serve all Americans;
- Require consultation between USDA's RUS, the NTIA, and the FCC;
- Create reporting requirements to ensure the FCC is meeting their build out goals; and
- Prioritize unserved areas, and further ensure tribal areas are served

We invite you to cosponsor the *Universal Broadband Act*, to provide the FCC with resources and direction to bring broadband to every home. By modernizing the USF, we can ensure a dependable revenue stream and provide the FCC with the ability to meet its mission to serve all Americans.

This legislation is a long-awaited reinvestment into the USF that prioritizes building out broadband without over-burdening the FCC from extensive new regulations. Congress must act to close the digital divide and ensure every household has broadband connection.

Current endorsements include: NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association, WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband, American Farm Bureau Federation, CoBank, Farm Credit Council, National Rural Health Association, American Association for Respiratory Care, and Minnesota Telecom Alliance.

To become a cosponsor, please have your staff contact Chelsea Cornett (Chelsea.Cornett@mail.house.gov) or (202) 225-2165 in Rep. Peterson's office or Michael Songer (Michael.Songer@mail.house.gov) or (202) 225-5765 in Rep. Young's office.

Sincerely,

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress

Don Young
Member of Congress