

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

INTERNET:
<http://baucus.senate.gov>

October 20, 2011

Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St SW
Washington, District of Columbia 20554-0004

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

I write regarding the National Broadband Plan and the reform of the Universal Service Fund and intercarrier compensation system. Since its creation in 1934, the FCC has been tasked with ensuring access “to all the people of the United States ... a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” I commend the FCC on its efforts to achieve the worthy goal of Universal Service. We must continue the effort to ensure that telecommunications services are available to *all* Americans, especially those in rural, insular, and high cost areas.

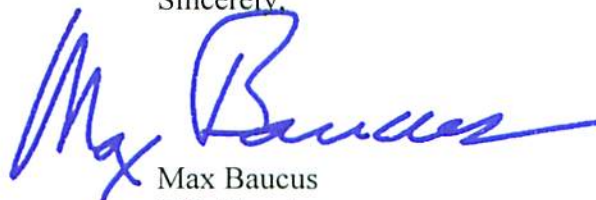
I previously joined my Senate colleagues to draw attention to the unique circumstances facing rural areas as the FCC reforms the Universal Service Fund to include broadband expansion. Thank you for your response and promise to consider existing investments in rural areas as the Fund is reformed. Modernization of the program is needed, but should not be done in a way that hinders services that rural residents rely on. I further call on the FCC to give full consideration to the ideas and structure of proposals submitted by rural telecom stakeholders.

I am encouraged that the Broadband Plan sets aggressive goals, such as bringing Internet access speeds of 100 megabits per second (Mbps) to 100 million homes. However, I fear the minimum goal for Internet speeds for rural residents of less than 4 Mbps will hurt the competitiveness of rural states like Montana. It is essential that rural areas have access to broadband services with comparable reliability, quality, and cost to the broadband access millions of Americans in more urban areas have already come to rely on.

Frontier states such as Montana face unique issues in broadband deployment that are critical to job growth and economic development in rural America. In Montana, the Universal Service Fund has been vitally important in supporting broadband capable telecommunications infrastructure investment in rural areas both for incumbent and competitive providers, wireline and wireless. The sustainability of main street businesses is especially essential in these fiscally challenging times.

I look forward to future cooperative efforts with the FCC to enhance economic, health care, and educational opportunities in our state. As the reforms to the Universal Service Fund continue, I call on the FCC to achieve an appropriate balance toward the goal of Universal Service by investing fairly in those telecommunications customers living in remote and frontier America.

Sincerely,



Max Baucus
U.S. Senator