



October 11, 2011

Senator Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow:

Thank you for your leadership and tireless work for rural America on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. As your committee finalizes recommendations to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Select Committee), we wanted to take this opportunity to express our support for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) communications infrastructure financing programs. These programs are critical to helping ensure Americans living in rural areas have access to an array of communications services that are essential to economic development, education, and health care.

While there can be no doubt regarding the severe nature of the debt crisis confronting our nation, we must ensure that we, as a nation, continue to support making broadband services available to all Americans – including those in rural areas of our country. Communication services, such as broadband, are no longer a necessity – they are essential services needed by every community and household to compete in the 21st Century. The goal of connecting all Americans is not finished – significant areas of rural America still lack access to modern broadband services. Because of the higher cost, due to lack of population density in rural markets, many of these areas will likely remain unserved without support from RUS.

Members of the National Telecommunication Cooperative Association (NTCA), Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA), and Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) continue to rely upon RUS for important financing options as private lenders reduce their lending, because of both the slow-down in the overall economy and regulatory uncertainty surrounding Universal Service and intercarrier compensation reform. The need for RUS programs remains high – as demonstrated by the fact that demand for the traditional RUS communication programs has exceeded appropriated capital in the previous three years.

Given the growing difficulty in securing private capital, recent reductions in appropriated funding for these programs, and the critical level of demand for broadband deployment financing, NTCA, WTA, and OPASTCO urge your committee to continue to support RUS' communications financing programs as you formulate recommendations to the Select Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Please feel free to contact Tom Wacker of NTCA at twacker@ntca.org, Randy Tyree of OPASTCO at rxt@opastco.org, or Derrick Owens of WTA at derrick@w-t-a.org if you have any questions.

/s/Shirley Bloomfield
Chief Executive Officer
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/s/John Rose
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/s/Kelly Worthington
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