Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Michael O'Rielly, and Mignon Clyburn
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai, Commissioner O'Rielly, and Commissioner Clyburn:

On May 6, 2014, 133 Members of Congress – 44 Senators and 89 House Members – signed bipartisan letters calling on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to make tailored modifications to modernize the federal Universal Service Fund (USF) for the delivery of broadband services to consumers in high-cost portions of the United States served by small, rural rate-of-return-regulated local exchange carriers. Similar letters were sent in May 2015 by more than 176 Members of Congress, including 61 Senators and 115 House Members.

The shared concern expressed in those letters was that rural consumers who wished to "cut the cord" on traditional voice "plain old telephone service" (POTS) and opt instead to obtain only fixed broadband services could not do so. As those letters noted, the FCC's old rules unfortunately tied USF support to a consumer's purchase of POTS, making it impossible for millions of rural consumers to obtain affordable "standalone broadband" without buying traditional telephone service as well.

Despite steps by the FCC last year to address this concern, we are hearing continued frustration about the prices for and the availability of standalone broadband. Many operators remain unable or unwilling to offer such broadband because their prices would still be unreasonably high even after the reforms. Other operators may offer standalone broadband, but the costs they are forced to recover from the consumer far exceed what urban consumers would pay for the same service.

All this means that, despite the reforms last year, millions of rural consumers are still not seeing widespread affordable standalone broadband services due to insufficient USF support. Meanwhile, the limited USF budget also created the need to reduce the amount available to carriers electing new "model-based" USF support, resulting in tens of thousands of rural consumers receiving lesser broadband speeds than intended by the model or, even worse, no broadband at all.

We understand the FCC is evaluating how to address concerns about the insufficiency of the current USF budget. Even as the FCC has moved to modernize these mechanisms as we requested, we are concerned that the lack of sufficient resources in the reformed programs (some of which remain capped at the same level as six years ago) may be undermining the desired effect of the reforms and falling short of the statutory mandate that reasonably comparable services at reasonably comparable rates be available to rural and urban Americans alike. We therefore encourage you to ensure sufficient resources are available to enable the USF mechanisms to work as designed – that is, to give rural Americans the opportunity to obtain affordable broadband and to advance broadband deployment in high-cost rural areas – along with any other program changes that may help achieve this goal.

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Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure rural American consumers and businesses have access to reasonably comparable voice and broadband communications services of their choosing at reasonably comparable rates.

Sincerely,

Kevin Cramer, Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack, Member of Congress

Robert Latta, Member of Congress

Peter Welch, Member of Congress

Adam Kinzinger, Member of Congress

Mark Pocan, Member of Congress

Steve King, Member of Congress

Markwayne Mullin, Member of Congress

Louie Gohmert, Member of Congress

Steve Stivers, Member of Congress

Lamar Smith, Member of Congress

Todd Rokita, Member of Congress

Jaime Herrera Beutler, Member of Congress

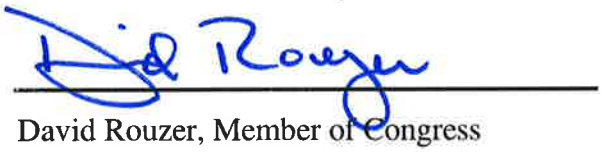
Scott Tipton, Member of Congress

John Garamendi, Member of Congress

Jackie Walorski, Member of Congress

Kurt Schrader, Member of Congress

Richard M. Nolan, Member of Congress



David Rouzer, Member of Congress

Kristi Noem, Member of Congress

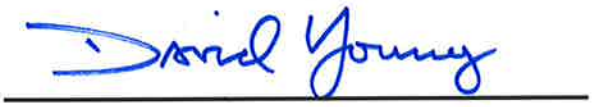
Frank Lucas, Member of Congress

Jared Huffman, Member of Congress

Jared Polis, Member of Congress

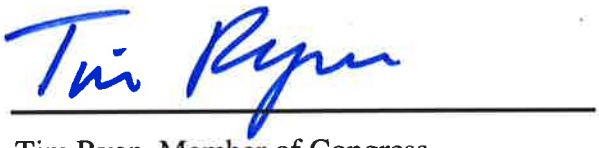
Rodney Davis, Member of Congress

Blake Farenthold, Member of Congress



David Young, Member of Congress

James Comer, Member of Congress



Tim Ryan, Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster, Member of Congress

Sean Duffy, Member of Congress

Larry Bucshon, Member of Congress

David B. McKinley, P. E. Member of Congress

Lynn Jenkins, Member of Congress

Paul Cook, Member of Congress

Rod Blum, Member of Congress

Sam Graves, Member of Congress

Collin Peterson, Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos, Member of Congress

Doug Collins, Member of Congress

John Shimkus, Member of Congress

Rick Crawford, Member of Congress

Ann Wagner, Member of Congress

Walter Jones, Member of Congress

Darin LaHood, Member of Congress

John J. Faso, Member of Congress

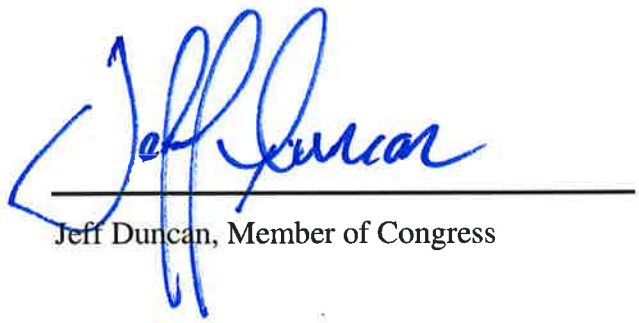
Carol Shea-Porter, Member of Congress

Doug Lamborn, Member of Congress

Gregg Harper, Member of Congress

Austin Scott, Member of Congress

Mike Bost, Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan, Member of Congress

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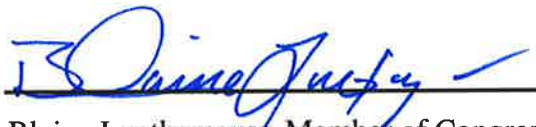
Luke Messer, Member of Congress

Steve Russell, Member of Congress

Tim Walz, Member of Congress

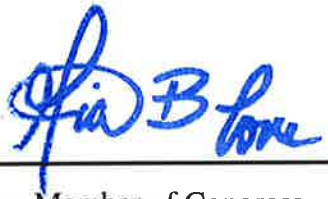
Tom Cole, Member of Congress



Blaine Luetkemeyer, Member of Congress

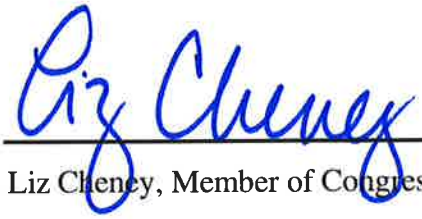
Rick W. Allen, Member of Congress

Will Hurd, Member of Congress

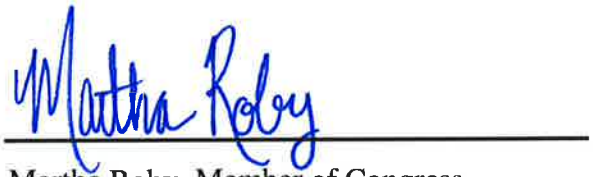


Mia Love, Member of Congress

Brett Guthrie, Member of Congress



Liz Cheney, Member of Congress



Martha Roby, Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree, Member of Congress

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Ron Kind, Member of Congress

Roger Marshall, Member of Congress

Mac Thornberry, Member of Congress

Mike Gallagher, Member of Congress

Andy Barr, Member of Congress

Michael McCaul, Member of Congress

Chris Stewart, Member of Congress

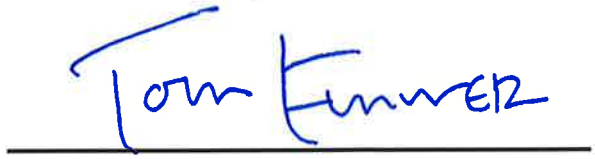
Diana DeGette, Member of Congress

Nydia Velazquez, Member of Congress

Bruce Westerman, Member of Congress

Peter DeFazio, Member of Congress

Hal Rogers, Member of Congress



Tom Emmer, Member of Congress

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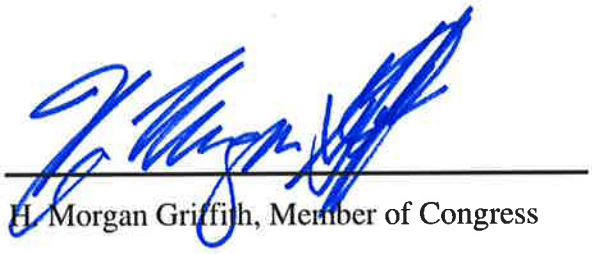

H. Morgan Griffith, Member of Congress

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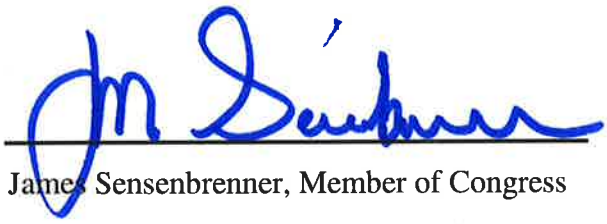
French Hill, Member of Congress

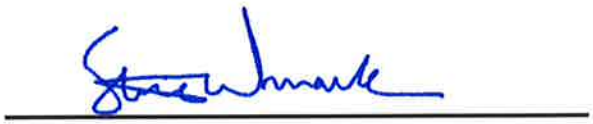
Pete Olson, Member of Congress

Bruce Poliquin, Member of Congress



James Sensenbrenner, Member of Congress

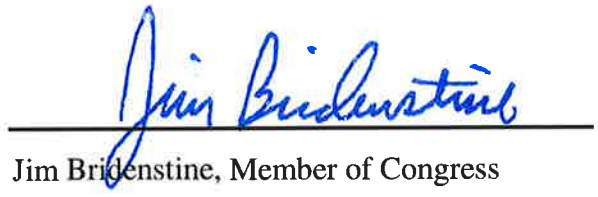
Steve Pearce, Member of Congress



Steve Womack, Member of Congress

Joe Wilson, Member of Congress

Henry Cuellar, Member of Congress



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James P. McGovern, Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer, Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán, Member of Congress