



May 8, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing the United States' information and communications industry, we urge you to support an amendment to the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act (H.R. 3935), offered by Senators Luján, Daines, Vance, Welch, Rosen, and Wicker, to fully fund the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program (Rip & Replace Program) and extend funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). This amendment will provide full and immediate funding for the Rip & Replace Program's current \$3.08 billion shortfall as well as \$6 billion to extend the ACP, which would be fully offset by future spectrum auction proceeds. Fully and immediately funding the removal, destruction, and replacement of untrusted network equipment via the Rip & Replace Program and sustaining the ACP are both critical for supporting and maintaining connectivity across the country, especially in rural areas and low-income communities.

For companies participating in the Rip & Replace Program, the situation is dire. Absent immediate funding from Congress, it is very likely that millions of Americans will experience

catastrophic losses in connectivity as soon as this summer. Many Rip & Replace participants, especially in Western states, including those serving Tribal lands will be forced to decide where to remove covered equipment and not replace it, eliminating services available today, both to their subscribers as well to anyone that roams onto their networks. Tens of millions of customers roam onto these networks while travelling to – and through – impacted areas and will have their connectivity and access to emergency services and 9-1-1 reduced or eliminated altogether. Due to lack of funds and the economic challenges associated with providing connectivity to sparsely populated rural areas, participating carriers, including those that are the only wireless provider serving much of their market, could go out of business altogether.

Failure to fully fund the Rip and Replace Program also means that untrusted equipment remains in service in the United States, including near military bases, airports, and other areas of strategic importance. Every day that passes increases the risk of devastating network failures as this untrusted equipment remains in networks and cannot be maintained. Participating carriers take national security and network security seriously, and they are working diligently to remove all equipment determined to pose a security threat, but they need Congress to provide adequate funding to complete this work.

Further, having a broadband connection has become critical to participation in the modern U.S. economy and society. The ACP has been enormously beneficial in helping achieve this reality – the over 23 million American households, including over 4.5 million senior citizens and nearly 1 million veteran households, use this subsidy for affordable broadband services. From rural, to tribal, to urban communities, the ACP has helped these families and individuals attain and maintain connectivity, which is essential for daily life. Not only does the ACP help maintain personal connectivity, but it also creates greater educational opportunities for students, assists with critical services access such as telehealth services in areas where healthcare services are sparse or too expensive, and fosters economic opportunities that only broadband connectivity can provide, including to small business owners who utilize e-commerce platforms reaching customers world-wide. The ACP has made an outsized economic impact. This amendment also makes important reforms to the ACP, offering commonsense policy to reflect the evolution from a COVID-19 era endeavor to a sustainable and responsible initiative.

The Rip & Replace and ACP Programs were created by Congress to secure and support connectivity across the U.S. Congress must provide this funding immediately to ensure the success of these programs and ensure that entire communities across the United States will not be left behind. This amendment is the necessary solution to maintaining connectivity for millions across the United States, securing American networks, and preserving the historic broadband investment Congress has made in rural and tribal communities, and we commend the Senators for their commitment to this effort. We urge you to include this amendment in the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act.

Sincerely,

Competitive Carriers Association

CTIA

Fiber Broadband Association

INCOMPAS

NATE: The Communications Infrastructure Contractors Association

NCTA - The Internet & Television Association

NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association

Rural Wireless Association

Telecommunications Industry Association

USTelecom – The Broadband Association

Wireless Infrastructure Association

WISPA – Broadband Without Boundaries

WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband

cc:

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

The Honorable Ted Cruz, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation