

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 22, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We appreciate your efforts to prioritize broadband deployment and support in rural America. Universal service – the requirement that Americans in even the most remote areas of the nation should have access to comparable services – includes access to reliable, affordable broadband. Therefore, we urge you to move forward with the Remote Areas Fund (RAF) to appropriately target limited Universal Service Fund (USF) support towards the most difficult to serve areas in our states that remain unserved.

The RAF has the potential to take another critical step towards addressing the current digital divide. We are encouraged by the Commission's recent reaffirmation that it "will seek to commence the Remote Areas Fund auction no later than one year after the commencement of the [Connect America Fund] Phase II auction." Many of the RAF-eligible communities still lack access to a viable broadband option. Therefore, we believe the RAF must be structured to reach these extremely high-cost areas throughout rural America.

Mindful of the Commission's objective of targeting these unserved or underserved areas, we believe technology-neutral rules will encourage broad and robust provider participation and will increase the likelihood that these remote areas will be served and deliver the most value per limited resources spent. Given that USF support is designed towards areas where there is no business case to offer comparable services at comparable rates, the Commission should structure the RAF so that providers, regardless of technology, can compete to serve unserved or underserved areas that have the greatest need for new broadband deployment.

We believe the RAF has the opportunity to narrow the broadband gap in the most remote, hardest to reach places in rural America. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you to ensure this universal service requirement becomes a reality.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

CC: Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission
CC: Mike O'Rielly, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission