

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Julius Genachowski  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chairman Genachowski:

Minnesotans understand the importance of a strong rural economy not just for our state but for the health of the nation. Access to affordable, high quality communications services is critical for the rural communities that are drivers of Minnesota's economy. The Universal Service Fund (USF) and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) have played an important role in ensuring that every corner of our state gets and stays connected to the communications services that families, farmers, and businesses need to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

In Minnesota small telephone companies and cooperatives have been instrumental towards bringing broadband service to rural, high-cost areas in our state, which are some of the hardest areas to serve. We have supported the programs that enable this important investment in Minnesota, as well as the FCC's effort to reform USF to support broadband capable networks and better target scarce resources to the areas that need it most. We request that as the FCC continues to implement USF reform, both of your agencies work closely with each other. We also urge you to be cognizant of the unique challenges that many rural carriers will encounter as you implement this reform. RUS must help borrowers plan for the impact of reform and provide flexibility where needed if consumers are at risk of losing service.

Given the importance of collaboration between your agencies, we look forward to your joint response to these issues.

Sincerely,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Senator Amy Klobuchar

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Senator Al Franken

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2013

The Honorable Julius Genachowski  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

We write today about expanding access to broadband, an issue vital to our home state of Minnesota. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) took a bold and important step when it reformed the Universal Service Fund to create a new Connect America Fund (CAF), and we applaud the FCC's commitment to significantly expand broadband access to previously unserved, rural Americans. We understand that there are remaining funds from CAF Phase I, and we respectfully request that the FCC work expeditiously to commence a second round of CAF I funding in order to deploy broadband to unserved areas as quickly as possible.

We were encouraged that providers serving Minnesota received approximately \$11 million in the first distribution of CAF I funds. These dollars will be used to provide high speed Internet access to over 14,000 households that were previously unserved in Minnesota. However, more must be done.

More than 226,000 residents in Minnesota remain without access to broadband. This is simply unacceptable. As the FCC has noted, broadband access is essential to innovation, jobs, and global competitiveness today, and it is only going to become more indispensable in the coming years. Farmers in rural Minnesota rely on the Internet to check market prices and buy and sell their products. Rural hospitals and clinics need high speed Internet access to coordinate with specialists and major hospitals in urban areas. And businesses cannot remain competitive—or even survive—without access to high speed Internet service.

Unfortunately, less than half of the funds allocated for CAF Phase I distribution were used. We appreciate that the FCC recognizes the need to reexamine its CAF funding guidelines in light of the need for more broadband and to productively use the remaining funds. We urge you to act as soon as possible to ensure that all of the remaining funds are allocated to expand broadband infrastructure where it is most needed.

Rural Minnesotans are entitled to the same high speed connectivity as Americans in urban areas. Unfortunately, almost a quarter of the population living in rural areas lacks access to broadband service and almost a third of the population living in tribal areas lacks access. It is essential that the FCC act as quickly as possible to deploy broadband to these areas and help close the digital divide in this country.



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Sincerely,



Al Franken  
United States Senator