

May 17, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

The Federal Communications Commission plays an imperative and unique role in addressing the telecommunication concerns across the United States, but especially in rural America. In the 21st century economy, robust telecommunications networks are imperative for the foundation of future innovations. I applaud the Commission's steadfast commitment to supporting broadband deployment and accelerating the deployment of wireless services to unserved communities.

The second phase of the Commission's Mobility Fund (MF-II) is \$4.53 billion in support over the next 10 years. At 38%, my home state of West Virginia has one of the highest number of eligible MF-II areas in the country, demonstrating a need for significant public and private investment. According to the Commission's most recent broadband progress report, West Virginia ranked 43rd for overall broadband deployment and nearly last for Mobile LTE access.

Congress has expressed consistent, bipartisan support for addressing the need for more reliable broadband data collection. Accurate broadband data collection processes can be especially challenging for rural communities with large, topographically diverse census blocks where only a small portion of the block may have reliable service. I am encouraged by the recently announced process to challenge presumptively ineligible communities to receive support. This will allow parties to challenge the current data and provide a clearer picture of broadband access throughout the country.

Because of your visits to our beautiful, mountainous state, I know that you've seen firsthand the topographical challenges we face. In parts of the country where topography makes deploying and maintaining broadband networks a significant challenge, standalone support will help bring enormous economic benefits for rural consumers. Unlike areas of the country that are relatively flat, the mountainous terrain of Appalachia can necessitate more tower installations to ensure that communities have access to service. This, in turn, makes the deployment of service much more expensive and time-consuming for providers.

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I am concerned that if topography is not taken into consideration, areas of the country like West Virginia risk being left behind as providers could naturally gravitate toward locations where it's more economically viable to serve. Because this is a 10-year program, I want to assure that locations that are currently eligible and locations that may become eligible through the challenge process are adequately funded by a formula adopted by the Commission that takes topography into consideration.

Therefore, I am asking that you set aside funding within the Mobility Fund II for unique topography and difficult locations, like West Virginia, when you release the auction procedures later this year. I am committed to ensuring that rural, mountainous states like West Virginia do not fall further behind and that less expensive networks over flatter terrain are not prioritized over another because of topography.

Thank you for your dedication to rural broadband deployment and for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Moore Capito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Capito:

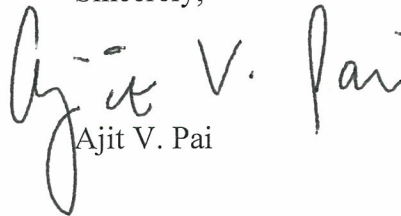
Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of high-speed broadband access to rural Americans. I wholeheartedly agree that closing the digital divide is our foremost mission as an agency, and I appreciate your recognition of the work of the Commission to foster further investment and innovation in the most remote corners of our country.

I agree with you that the Commission's Mobility Fund Phase II auction represents a unique opportunity to accelerate the deployment of wireless services to unserved communities. And I thank you for your support in our work to ensure reliable wireless coverage maps, including our recent improvements to make the challenge process for that upcoming auction more robust.

You have shown me firsthand the difficulties of deploying broadband, and especially high-quality mobile broadband, in the hollers of West Virginia, and the Commission is taking action to ensure an area's topography is addressed as part of the Mobility Fund Phase II auction. Indeed, the framework we adopted for that auction specifically requires that we incorporate a terrain factor into the auction design. This terrain factor will ensure that more funding is available in hard-to-deploy areas such as rural West Virginia. And we have designed the auction so that this approach will not prioritize less expensive networks over flatter terrain—in my mind, all bidders should be on even footing no matter the terrain they cover.

Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring that rural Americans can access the high-speed broadband services so prevalent in urban America. I look forward to continuing our work together until we close the digital divide. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,


Ajit V. Pai