

JONI K. ERNST  
IOWA

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE  
111 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510  
PHONE: 202-224-3254  
FAX: 202-224-9369  
WWW.ERNST.SENATE.GOV

## United States Senate

May 8, 2018

403

COMMITTEES  
ARMED SERVICES  
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION  
AND FORESTRY  
ENVIRONMENT  
AND PUBLIC WORKS  
SMALL BUSINESS  
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Received & Inspected

MAY 21 2018

FCC Mailroom

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

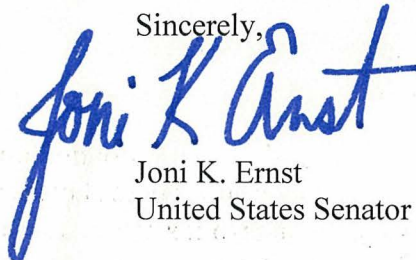
In March 2018, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted an order that provided an infusion of new funding for the high-cost program within the Universal Service Fund (USF). As you know, the USF's high-cost program is extremely important to rural America, as it helps bring affordable broadband service to parts of the country that are the most difficult and costly to serve. I thank you for these important efforts and your ongoing work to address the digital divide.

Iowa is one of our nation's most rural states and is home to more local telephone companies than any other state. These companies are fixtures in their towns and take great pride in the service they provide to their communities. Despite progress in recent years, it remains challenging for small providers to build out broadband to rural areas. The USF's high-cost program has played a key role in helping these companies build out broadband, and it's important that the high-cost program remains a reliable and effective tool for them.

Access to reliable broadband is a necessity in the modern economy. It provides farmers and small businesses with access to important market data and makes it easier for them to target new customers and grow their operations. It also provides our patients with better access to healthcare providers and our students with new learning opportunities.

With these concerns in mind, I ask that you continue working to ensure that the USF's high-cost program is able to meet the needs of rural America. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to continued dialogue with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator

CC: Commissioner Michael O'Rielly  
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel  
Commissioner Brendan Carr

DES MOINES OFFICE  
733 FEDERAL BUILDING  
210 WALNUT STREET  
DES MOINES, IA 50309  
PHONE: 515-284-4574  
FAX: 515-284-4937

CEDAR RAPIDS OFFICE  
111 SEVENTH AVENUE SE  
SUITE 480  
CEDAR RAPIDS, IA 52401  
PHONE: 319-365-4504  
FAX: 319-365-4683

DAVENPORT OFFICE  
201 WEST SECOND STREET  
SUITE 806  
DAVENPORT, IA 52801  
PHONE: 563-322-0677  
FAX: 563-322-0854

SIOUX CITY OFFICE  
194 FEDERAL BUILDING  
320 SIXTH STREET  
SIOUX CITY, IA 51101  
PHONE: 712-252-1550  
FAX: 712-252-1638

COUNCIL BLUFFS OFFICE  
221 FEDERAL BUILDING  
8 SOUTH SIXTH STREET  
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51501  
PHONE: 712-352-1167  
FAX: 712-352-0087



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

August 6, 2018

The Honorable Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senate  
111 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

Thank you for your letter on the importance of high-speed broadband access to Americans in the most rural areas of the country, including those in Iowa. I wholeheartedly agree that closing the digital divide is our foremost mission as an agency, and I appreciate your recognition of the work the Commission completed earlier this year to foster further deployment in the most remote corners of our country.

In March, the Commission devoted over \$500 million to increasing deployment by small carriers in rural communities—a reversal of the prior Administration’s policy of punishing these carriers instead of rewarding them for providing high-speed, high-quality services. As part of that action, we also doubled down on our model-based support for hard-to-serve communities, increasing the funding for carriers willing to build out in an efficient manner. In April, we then moved forward by proposing to eliminate many of the legacy burdens for small, model-based carriers serving businesses in rural American—burdens that unnecessarily divert funding from build-out to paperwork. And in June, we eliminated a rule that penalized small rural carriers with extra Universal Service fees whenever they offered broadband.

Nonetheless, I agree with you that more must be done if we’re going to extend digital opportunity to all Americans. In March, the Commission issued a detailed Notice of Proposed Ruling that explores how to ensure sufficient and predictable support over the long term. In particular, we take a close look at expanding access to and funding for our small-carrier cost model and seek to end the unpredictable cuts to carriers not on the model. Increased funding will boost broadband deployment in Iowa and all of rural America, and the additional reforms will put our high-cost system on a more efficient path so that every Iowan and every American can benefit from the digital revolution. Commission staff is carefully reviewing the record in the proceeding, and I aim to circulate an order ensuring adequate and efficient funding for rural broadband deployment later this year.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ajit" being the most prominent part.

Ajit V. Pai