

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 13, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20536

**1194**

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

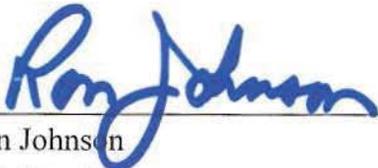
Phase II of the Connect America Fund (“CAF II”) offers an opportunity to bring high speed, broadband connections to millions of Americans in rural areas served by the larger “price cap” carriers. Indeed, the FCC’s June 10 Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) has raised hopes by more than doubling the promised download speeds in the 2011 USF/ICC Transformation Order, from 4 Mbps to 10 Mbps. And because CAF II represents the final phase of Universal Service reform, its rule will effectively determine, for years to come, how broadband support is distributed in these areas.

We are writing today to emphasize how important it is to ensure that the final details of CAF II live up to its promise. We are concerned that if the Commission more than doubles the speed requirements without allowing the appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II, the program’s overall mission could be endangered.

To the Commission’s credit, its FNPRM identifies a number of constructive ideas that could help achieve the high speed network goals. These include extending the term of support up to ten years and providing flexibility on the build-out parameters. We hope you will include these goals in the final implementation of CAF II without exceeding the CAF II annual budget.

Thank you for considering our concerns, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson  
U.S. Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senator

cc: Commissioner Clyburn  
Commissioner Rosenworcel  
Commissioner Pai  
Commissioner O’Rielly



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senate  
717 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the implementation of certain aspects of Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II). In your letter, you express concerns that the overall mission of the CAF II program could be endangered if the Commission increases the current broadband speed benchmark for program. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

The universal service program is one of the most important tools at our disposal to ensure that consumers and businesses in rural America have the same opportunities as their urban and suburban counterparts to be active participants in the United States of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are focused on updating the universal service high-cost program to ensure that we are delivering the best possible voice and broadband experiences to rural areas of states within the confines of our Connect America budget, while providing increased certainty and predictability for all carriers and a climate for increased broadband expansion.

In December 2014, the Commission adopted a *Connect America Fund Phase II Report and Order* to move forward with Connect America for price-cap carriers. While I appreciate your concern about increasing the broadband speed benchmark for CAF II, the Commission, consistent with our statutory obligation to ensure that rural Americans have access to services that are reasonably comparable to those available to their urban and suburban neighbors, voted to increase the minimum broadband speed to 10 Mbps from 4 Mbps. With respect to your concern about allowing the appropriate level of flexibility in other elements of CAF II, I note that the Order extends the term of support for price-cap carriers that accept the state-level commitment and gives those carriers more flexibility in serving those areas.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", written over a horizontal line.

Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
United States Senate  
386 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Tom Wheeler