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FCC Mail Room

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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December 5, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As you know, the media marketplace continues to evolve in new and exciting ways. Internet speeds and access continue to grow, and consumers have more cable channels and online media options. However, access to these opportunities remains a challenge for many – particularly the most rural Americans not yet reached by the fastest broadband and seniors who continue to access video content solely through television.

In addition to technological challenges, consumers' do not always have the ability to access locally-important rural television content. While we understand there are business reasons for programmers to focus on urban and suburban demographics, rural-focused channels providing rural news, community-focused event coverage, and family programming have a demonstrated record of success. In addition, such channels fill a need in rural communities which is frequently unfilled by more urban competitors, such as television coverage of agricultural news important to farmers and ranchers.

For this reason, we respectfully request you and the Commission remain mindful of the challenges faced by rural Americans as you consider issues before the Commission. We remain committed to working with you to ensure all Americans have the opportunity to access the content most relevant to their work, families, and communities.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

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Colli C. Rehm

Bill Shuster

Jason T. Smith

Jefferson Bishop Jr.

Terri Sewell

Cheri Bustos

Reid J. Ribble

Jeff Fortenberry

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Mark V. Aubrey

Chris Stewart

Nikki Rogers

Martha Roby

Paul A. Gosar

Robert B. Adler

Steve Daines

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Reid Ribble
U.S. House of Representatives
1513 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Ribble:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

You also indicate in your letter that the video marketplace is evolving and shifting with more content provided through broadband connections. Like you, I recognize that having access to broadband is a challenge for many rural Americans. In our recent 2015 Broadband Progress Report, adopted on January 29, 2015, the Commission found that broadband deployment is not keeping pace. The Commission indicated that over half of rural Americans lack access to the updated broadband benchmark speeds of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads, whereas only eight percent of urban Americans lack access to the same benchmark speeds. Based on the number of unserved Americans and for other reasons, the Commission concluded that broadband is not being deployed in a reasonable and timely fashion. The Commission recognized that while we have made progress, more work needs to be done.

We will continue to take steps to bring robust broadband to the nation and, in particular, rural areas. Since 2011, the Commission has been working to bring broadband to rural Americans through the Connect America Fund (CAF). The program is part of the Universal Service Fund that supports broadband networks in unserved rural areas. Hundreds of millions of dollars already have been invested, with more than $20 billion more to come over the next five years for fixed service. Our Mobility Fund has already targeted $220 million in support to upgrade areas currently without 3G service, within 27 states, with an additional $50 million targeted to remote and underserved areas on Tribal lands. The Commission has also been working to improve wireless broadband services in rural areas. Not only are we working to make more spectrum available to all Americans, including those in rural areas, but our Mobile Spectrum Holding rules help ensure access in rural areas to spectrum necessary if competitors are to fill in the blank white spaces on the coverage maps we see on TV commercials. Finally, the Commission recently modernized the E-rate program to help close the digital divide in rural

schools and libraries by ensuring equitable access to funding for Wi-Fi, providing additional flexibility to schools and libraries seeking affordable high-speed broadband connections, and adjusting the E-rate cap to ensure sufficient funding is available to meet the program goals.

I am hopeful that these recent actions will help deliver greater competition and more choice for consumers. In addition, in conjunction with the release of the 2015 Broadband Progress Report, we issued a Notice of Inquiry that sought comment on what additional steps the Commission can take to accelerate broadband deployment, especially in rural areas.

Please be assured the Commission will continue to keep rural Americans' needs in mind as it moves ahead with its work. I appreciate hearing directly from you on the issues that face your constituents and hope to continue a dialogue with you.

Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Robert B. Aderholt
U.S. House of Representatives
2369 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Aderholt:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Mark Amodei
U.S. House of Representatives
222 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Amodei:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Spencer Bachus
U.S. House of Representatives
2246 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Bachus:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Sanford D. Bishop
U.S. House of Representatives
2429 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Bishop:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Cheri Bustos
U.S. House of Representatives
1005 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Bustos:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Bradley Byrne
U.S. House of Representatives
2236 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Byrne:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 11, 2015

The Honorable Steve Daines
U.S. House of Representatives
206 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Daines:

Thank you for your letter expressing support for access to video programming, including programming specific to rural communities. I appreciate hearing your views.

This issue has been raised by commenters in the context of the pending transactions between Comcast and Time Warner Cable, and AT&T and DirecTV. With regard to your specific concern about rural-focused programming, I note that RFD-TV, a Nebraska-based digital cable and satellite television channel, along with many of its viewers, have filed comments in both of the pending proceedings. Please be assured that the views of RFD-TV and its viewers will be given careful consideration as the staff reviews the record in the proceedings.

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