Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 11, 2015

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We write to request that you carefully consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands.

As you know, Section 254 of the Communications Act charges the Commission with ensuring that "Consumers in all regions of the Nation, including low-income consumers and those in rural, insular, and high cost areas" have access to telecommunications and information services "that are reasonably comparable" to those in urban areas. Yet too many New Mexicans living in rural areas continue to live on the wrong side of the digital divide. According to the Commission's 2015 Broadband Progress Report, 77 percent of New Mexicans living in rural areas lack fixed broadband access, which compares to 8 percent of Americans living in urban areas and 17 percent of the U.S. population as a whole.

The broadband challenge for those living on Tribal lands is even more dire. In New Mexico, nearly 90 percent of those living on Tribal lands do not have access to fast broadband. Since broadband technologies can create opportunities for economic growth, education, and healthcare delivery, these appalling statistics do not adequately convey the negative impacts of this digital divide for Indian Country.

Our understanding is that the Commission is evaluating a proposal for a "Tribal Broadband Factor" to target support for broadband on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. This proposal would direct $25 million annually for ten years from existing universal service funds to broadband deployment on Tribal lands. The proposal further includes benchmarks for deployment to hold broadband providers accountable for making progress toward tackling the digital divide.

As you have previously noted, universal service reform is a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to ensure greater broadband access. We therefore respectfully request that you carefully consider the proposal for a Tribal Broadband Factor to help direct universal service support to areas where it is most needed to end the digital divide.

Thank you for your consideration and reply.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Steve Pearce
United States Representative

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján
United States Representative

Michelle Lujan Grisham
United States Representative

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Steve Pearce
U.S. House of Representatives
2432 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pearce:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. As you know, I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country, including on the visit you and I had to the Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

On February 12, I circulated an Order to modernize universal support for rate-of-return carriers. The proposed Order sets forth a package of reforms to address rate-of-return issues that are fundamentally intertwined—the need to modernize the program to provide support for stand-alone broadband service; the need to improve incentives for broadband investment to connect unserved rural Americans; and the need to strengthen the rate-of-return system to provide certainty and stability for years to come. A Further Notice included with the Order would specifically seek comment on additional reforms, including the Tribal Broadband Factor proposal you reference in your letter, to further incentivize broadband investment and deployment on unserved and underserved Tribal lands.

I recognize that the challenges before us are great. But working together, we will seize upon technological opportunities to improve lives across Indian Country. I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
U.S. House of Representatives
2446 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Luján:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. As you know, I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country, including on the visit you and I had to the Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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Tom Wheeler

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WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
United States Senate
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Heinrich:

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Sincerely,

Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
U.S. House of Representatives
214 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Grisham:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to consider a proposal for targeted investments in broadband infrastructure on unserved and underserved Tribal lands. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission's review.

I wholeheartedly agree that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. As you know, I personally have seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country, including on the visit you and I had to the Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico. The lack of services and infrastructure reinforces a history of isolation that has limited economic and educational opportunities. That is why expanding high-speed broadband connections to all corners of the country is a top priority for the Commission. Nowhere could meeting this objective be more impactful than on Tribal lands.

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Tom Wheeler

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

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