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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Received & Inspected
DEC 28 2015
FCC Mail Room

December 21, 2015

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As you work to create the framework for the CAF II reverse auction, I write to urge you to structure the auction so that funding is made available on a priority basis for fiber to the home networks. There is a rural digital divide in our country and the gap should not be narrowed with satellite or unlicensed fixed-wireless networks.

I understand that approximately \$400 million in funding for broadband in the State of Missouri will be awarded to broadband providers in a reverse auction that is expected to take place in 2016. Missouri has a once in a decade opportunity to bring ultra-fast fiber to rural residents in areas where large private companies have declined their right of first refusal to accept model-based support under Phase II of the FCC's Connect America Fund. Satellite or fixed-wireless will not meet the needs of Missouri's rural residents either now or in the future. These services are not reasonably comparable to the broadband services that are available in urban areas. Roughly 10% of the rural population in the country has wireline upload speeds of 10 Mbps or greater as compared with 53% in the urban areas. Many of Missouri's Electric Cooperatives are ready to fill this digital divide with future-proof fiber optic networks that will increase rural Missouri's download speeds so businesses can thrive and compete.

Five Missouri Electric Cooperatives are actively deploying fiber to the home (FTTH) networks today, proving FTTH is possible in rural areas. More cooperatives are expressing interest in deploying broadband, and accessing the CAF auction funds. Missouri Electric Cooperatives together own over 15,000 miles of fiber optic networks and have the technical and financial qualifications to bring broadband to all rural areas in Missouri. Giving my state and my constituents a chance to lead the country with FTTH networks will ensure the viability of their communities through education, access to government services, job opportunities, and business attraction.

Rural Missouri's future economic growth potential depends on this auction being structured correctly. The FCC has a chance to be forward thinking and help to bridge the digital divide in rural areas of Missouri with fiber optic networks. Missouri's rural fiber networks will be the example for how the rest of the country can narrow the digital divide fairly.

Sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Emanuel Cleaver
U.S. House of Representatives
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cleaver:

Thank you for your letter advocating that funding in the Connect America Fund Phase II reverse auction be made available on a priority basis for fiber to the home networks. 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 share your interest in bridging the rural digital divide in our country. 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 21st century economy. The Commission is 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 while providing a climate for increased broadband expansion, all within the confines of the Connect America Fund's budget.

As you may know, I have circulated an Order to my fellow Commissioners for their consideration that will address the framework for the Connect America Fund (CAF) Phase II competitive bidding process. One of the primary policy goals for this competitive bidding process is to ensure widespread participation from all providers that can deliver a high-quality service. Simply put, more competition between providers means that limited universal service funding will be used efficiently to deliver the best possible solutions.

I can assure you that Commission staff is very much aware of the work being done by the Missouri Electric Cooperatives, and staff has met with their representatives to further discuss their views. As the Commission moves forward with finalizing the structure of the CAF Phase II reverse auction, we will take into consideration the issues and concerns presented by all stakeholders and give full attention to the best ways to ensure that rural communities, including those in Missouri, have access to robust and reliable broadband service.

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".

Tom Wheeler