

September 9, 2014

To: FCC  
From: Dr. Don Albrecht, Director, Western Rural Development Center  
RE: AT&T/DIRECTV Merger and Broadband Expansion

I am the Director of the Western Rural Development Center, one of four Regional Rural Development Centers in the U.S. The focus of the Regional Rural Development Centers is to assist the residents and communities of rural America in addressing issues of concern. Of major significance are concerns with economic development. Throughout U.S. history, rural residents have had lower incomes, lower employment levels and higher rates of poverty than their urban counterparts. This is because urban businesses, by definition, are closer to markets and consumers. These issues have become more pronounced in recent years with employment declines in agriculture, the natural resource industries and manufacturing, the traditional primary employers of rural workers.

I am convinced that high-speed Internet could reduce some of the economic disadvantages experienced by rural residents. With modern information and communication technology, many high-quality jobs have much more geographic flexibility than in the past. With high-speed Internet, many individuals, families and firms can establish their homes and businesses where they wish and still be connected to necessary markets and consumers. Of special significance is that rural areas now have the potential to attract "creative" jobs that have significant geographic mobility.

To realize these opportunities, rural residents must have access to high-speed broadband. Unfortunately, for many rural residents broadband is simply unavailable or is available at much slower speeds compared to urban areas. The economic implications of these disadvantages are profound. For these reasons I am very excited about the commitment of AT&T/DIRECTV to provide broadband to millions of rural residents. Given this commitment, I strongly favor the proposed merger.