



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

January 23, 2015

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
United States Senate  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

Thank you for your letter regarding the lack of broadband access for Americans living on Tribal lands. In your letter, you urge the Commission to engage in formal Tribal consultation with Tribal Nations regarding the importance of the high-cost loop support (HCLS) mechanism in deployment of broadband services on Tribal lands. You also express concern regarding recent HCLS reforms. 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 with your view that access to broadband technology is critical for Tribal communities to participate fully in today's economy. I have personally seen the lack of communications services and infrastructure across Indian Country, which has created 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.

The Commission is strongly committed to working with Tribal Nations through meaningful and vigorous efforts on a regular basis in all regions of the country. We are also committed to ensuring that Tribal concerns are appropriately considered and addressed as part of the Commission's broader efforts to improve broadband deployment throughout the United States. At the National Congress of American Indians 2014 Executive Council Winter conference, I emphasized the importance of establishing a reinvigorated Tribal consultation process that addresses many goals, including: (1) improving access to world class broadband infrastructure; (2) access to spectrum and wireless infrastructure; and (3) ensuring a diversity of media ownership voices in Indian Country. I also stressed the need for Tribal community planners and policy representatives to build relationships with the Commission's Office of Native Affairs and Policy (ONAP). ONAP has developed and manages a comprehensive plan to strengthen the Commission's consultation and training efforts in all regions of the country. This includes Commission-hosted regional Tribal training and consultation workshops and participation in many Indian Country outreach events. In 2014, for example, ONAP hosted five regional consultation workshops.

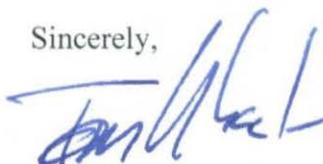
In addition, this October, the Commission took steps to reinvigorate the FCC-Native Nations Broadband Task Force, with the appointment of 31 members representing 20 Tribal Nations and 11 Bureaus and Offices within the Commission. The Task Force, comprised of

elected and appointed leaders from federally-recognized Tribal governments or governmental entities and senior staff from across the Commission, acts as a consultative sounding board for Commission proposals and develops additional recommendations for broadband deployment and adoption. The voices of this Task Force are important to our efforts to close broadband gaps on Tribal lands and ensure that the concerns of Tribal governments are considered at the Commission. I look forward to their contributions as we work together to bring world class connectivity to Tribal Nations.

Finally, the Commission, with ONAP's leadership, plans to build upon its ongoing consultative relationship with the Tribal Nations who own and operate rate-of-return carriers. Upon ONAP's creation in 2010, the very first meeting in which ONAP staff participated in Indian Country was the National Tribal Telecommunications Association (NTTA) conference on the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona. NTTA's primary members are the eight Tribally-owned rate-of-return carriers. In each year since 2010, ONAP has actively engaged with NTTA both in Indian Country and at the Commission. In 2015, the Commission plans to continue to engage and consult with Tribal Nations, NTTA, and others in Indian Country on long-term reform of rate-of-return support.

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