

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 19, 2014

1060

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20536

Received & Inspected

OCT 01 2014

FCC Mail Room

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

I understand that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recently proposed making several changes to Phase II of the Connect America Fund (CAF II). I am writing today to emphasize how important it is to ensure that the final implementations of CAF II fulfill its promise to provide fast and reliable broadband access to rural communities.

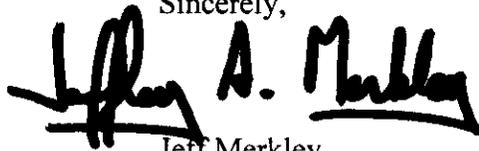
The FCC's June 10th Further NPRM to increase the broadband requirement to 10 Mbps has raised the hopes of rural communities in overcoming the digital divide. However, I am concerned that if the FCC moves forward with this proposal without allowing for some flexibility in the requirements, broadband providers will be unable to reach the goals that CAF II set out to achieve.

During CAF I, entire areas would be disqualified for receiving support if an Internet provider claimed to serve just a portion of the population. The FCC should be specific as possible when targeting areas for broadband support and allow service claims to be verified through independent testing. In addition, the FCC should employ a 10 Mbps standard for all communities, including those that currently meet the 4 Mbps standard. This will help ensure that everybody has equal access to the Internet, not just a select few.

To make the most out of CAF II, the FCC should allow broadband providers the ability to substitute extremely high cost locations with unserved areas in partially served census blocks. This will help broadband providers meet deployment obligations and also maximize the amount of people who will gain access to high-speed Internet. Finally, the FCC should consider extending the funding for this program from five years to 10 years to ensure that broadband providers have the necessary amount of time to build high-capacity networks in rural communities.

Thank you for consideration of these recommendations and your efforts to bridge the digital divide. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senator