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Senate Minority Leader

February 13, 2002

Chairman Michael Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Proceeding # 01-348

Dear Chairman Powell:

I am writing in regard to the lack of broadband Internet options causing a "digital divide" in rural states like ours and the need for high-speed broadband Internet options to help close that gap.

As a Senator, businessman, and farmer, who represents some of the most rural portions of our state, I am always looking for ways to help close the digital divide gap. For rural states like ours to survive, thrive and compete, it is critical that rural users and small businesses be afforded the same access to high-speed Internet options as their urban counterparts. Only a very small percentage of rural North Dakotans can receive high-speed DSL or wireless Internet access. In fact, high-speed DSL or cable Internet isn't even available to all of our city's residents. Today, anyone with a phone line can connect to the Internet via a slow dial-up, if they're lucky enough to get through. So, we need to look for more options and alternatives.

With access to broadband Internet, workers could more easily "tele-commute" and connect to a remote home office elsewhere in the country. Our citizens can engage in distance learning. Our small businesses can sell their products on the world wide web. Our rural hospitals can engage in telemedicine, where there are ever-shrinking resources. I have seen many applications where broadband Internet access can help our state.

I have read information recently concerning a company that is looking to provide high-speed Internet access via a small satellite dish just like those used for television - EchoStar - a company to be formed as the result of DirecTV and Dish Network joining forces. A wireless option via satellite is a great fit for rural states like ours where a physical infrastructure of copper and fiber are too expensive to connect every single household or small business in the state in an affordable manner. That's why the broadband Internet access via EchoStar would be a great idea and I hope you can support it.

Thanks for your consideration of this merger - it will be great tool to help rural states like ours survive, thrive, and compete in the marketplace.

Sincerely,

Senator Aaron Krauter