



Save Rural Broadband Campaign

High speed broadband Internet access has become today's essential service to all Americans, but new government rules being proposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) could impact customers' access to broadband Internet service. You can help by lending your voice to the debate.

At the onset of telephone service back in the 1950's, the federal government created a universal service policy to ensure that all Americans, including those in rural areas, had access to affordable communications services. The cost for providing voice service to rural communities has always been significantly higher than for urban areas because of the expansive distances to cover. Had the small independent companies not stepped up in those days to connect rural towns, non-metropolitan areas would not have received services when they did. Back then, the government recognized the need for these essential services and determined that financial support would be necessary to help build networks out to rural areas of America. The resulting funding mechanism was called Universal Service Fund (USF).

Many rural companies, like local exchange carrier, Madison Telephone Company, have, over the years, received USF and have invested millions of dollars to build advanced networks to meet the needs of their customers. This construction was done with the understanding that the government would continue to support rural network infrastructure. Without these funds, it is impossible for rural carriers to deliver the network that spurs rural economic opportunity, supports educational growth, and attracts businesses to rural regions. Just as with the national highway system, the information highway costs money to sustain, grow, and expand.

Now the government is thinking about changing the fund. If this happens and the

support for rural companies cut, many communities like yours will find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The FCC wants to do away with USF and other financing mechanisms that support rural, high-cost telephone and broadband services. It wants to create something called the Connect America Fund. While this is a good idea to help facilitate the transition to support increased broadband services in rural communities, the FCC officials need to ensure that they don't destroy the funding mechanism that now delivers telecommunications services to rural America.

It is essential that all rural consumers get educated about the proposed policies and communicate to members of Congress and the White House about the negative impact this could have on our local communities. The current FCC proposal would penalize rural broadband providers and put existing affordable, high-quality broadband service for rural areas in serious jeopardy. Also, it would undermine the ability of local providers to upgrade services year after year.

The current USF structure has been a great success story for our country. It has enabled our country to stay connected and allowed rural providers based locally to deliver affordable, advanced communications services for their customers. However, the job for which this funding tool was created is still not done.

As consumers, you can make a difference in this debate. Your contact with policy-makers will ensure that the FCC makes the right changes to USF so that rural communities remain connected to the global world and can continue to reap the rewards of an accessible, affordable, and sustainable broadband network.

To support this effort, you can send a letter to your members of Congress and the White House by visiting gomadison.com/legalregulatory/saveruralbroadband.