



INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE

February 20, 2008

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte,

The telephone carriers of the Independent Telephone and Telecommunications Alliance (ITTA) and the 26 million customers they serve applaud you for including language in the Farm Bill that will improve broadband access for rural America and restore accountability through better targeting of Rural Utility Service (RUS) funds. As negotiations continue on the overall funding of the Farm Bill we remain hopeful that provisions regarding the RUS will remain intact.

Broadband has created economic hope for parts of our country that struggle to compete in the global economy. We appreciate the wisdom that you have demonstrated as you shepherd the Farm Bill through the House and we remain hopeful, that the Senate and House will soon go to conference so that millions of Americans can begin to enjoy all the benefits that broadband presents.

Most important, ITTA strongly supports ensuring that the RUS does not loan money where current broadband providers are already offering service. Both Chambers have included language to prevent loans from being made to any community where at least three incumbent service providers already offer comparable services. We support that provision and we are encouraged that accountability measures have been included.

We also support the Senate provisions that allow carriers of any size to be eligible for RUS broadband loans and hope these provisions will be included in the final version. Low-interest broadband infrastructure loans are valuable to the community because they improve the business case for building to an otherwise unserved area. Removing this restriction will ensure equal access for all rural communities, regardless of who serves them.

Furthermore, ITTA member companies strongly support provisions in the House bill that will require eligible entities to meet benchmarks for broadband deployment. In addition to benchmarks, loans that are granted should be provided to entities that have the proper resources to make repayment obligations and the House bill includes provisions to reduce the number of defaulted loans and ITTA strongly endorses that provision.

Once again, the ITTA applauds your leadership and dedication during the long process of reforming the RUS program. We remain hopeful that the current negotiations on spending

will be resolved and we look forward to improving the broadband networks of our country through the reforms in the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Stamp', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Curt Stamp
President
Independent Telephone and Telecommunications Alliance