



**INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE**

April 9, 2008

Chairman, Colin Peterson  
House Agriculture Committee  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member, Bob Goodlatte  
House Agriculture Committee  
1305 Longworth Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte:

The Independent Telephone & Telecommunication Alliance (ITTA) is a national trade association representing mid-size carriers that offer telecommunications and information services to more than 26 million customers in 44 states. Many of the customers served by ITTA companies are in the most rural and insular parts of our country. Despite the challenges associated with serving less-dense, high-cost rural markets, ITTA companies have committed billions of dollars in investment in broadband services. ITTA companies are also held accountable from a regulatory perspective by various state commissions and agencies as the required, carrier of last resort in the markets they service.

The USDA Rural Development Program has been instrumental in providing capital to help bring the latest technology to rural America. In recent years, however, the Rural Development Program has often become a funding vehicle to award taxpayer dollars to entities that lack the engineering expertise, experience, business background, or personal dedication to fully deliver the broadband promise to unserved parts of our Nation. Furthermore, Rural Development funds have been used to support carriers serving metropolitan areas, as well as to support duplicative high-cost investment where broadband has already been deployed.

On March 25, 2008, USDA awarded Open Range Communications a \$267 million loan from the USDA Rural Development Program to provide broadband service to 51 rural communities in 17 states. While ITTA recognizes that many parts of our country are still without adequate broadband service, we would argue that New York and Los Angeles are neither rural nor unserved when it comes to broadband. Nevertheless, the latest Open Range loan approval will provide tax dollar, low interest loans to provide broadband in the metropolitan statistic areas (MSA) of New York, Los Angeles, and many other urban MSA's.

ITTA encourages you to take a closer look at the recent Open Range Communications Rural Development loan to ensure that the taxpayer dollars are being well spent and the funds are truly going to the unserved rural markets. In fact, the House and Senate passed Farm Bill would make great strides in accountability that would prevent future funding to entities that do not meet the benchmarks established in the Farm Bills.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that innovation, investment, accountability, and commitment continue to be the hallmarks of rural telecommunications service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Curt Stamp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Curt Stamp  
President  
ITTA