



INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE

February 15, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss,

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 funds.

As you know, broadband has created another realm of 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 Senate and we remain hopeful, that the House will name conferees soon so ITTA member companies can meet the unique challenges that serving rural America presents.

Most important, ITTA supports ensuring that the Rural Utility Service (RUS) does not loan money where current broadband providers are already offering service. The Senate bill includes language to prevent loans from being made to any community where at least three incumbent service providers already offer comparable services. We strongly support that provision and we are encouraged that accountability measures such as that have been included.

Furthermore, ITTA member companies strongly support provisions in the Senate bill that will ensure that eligible entities will 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 Senate 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 and we look forward improving the broadband networks of our country through the reforms in the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Curt Stamp
President
Independent Telephone and Telecommunications Alliance