

September 18, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Capitol Building H-232  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Committee On Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H307 Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515-6015

The Honorable Hakeem S. Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Capitol Building H-204  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Capitol Building S-128  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Capitol Building S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Capitol Building S-128  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Capitol Building S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Chair  
Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation  
U.S. Senate  
Russell Senate Office Building 254  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Chair  
Committee On Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H307 Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515-6015

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation  
U.S. Senate  
Russell Senate Office Building 254  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Speaker, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell,

We, the undersigned organizations, representing millions of rural Americans and their livelihoods, urge you to renew the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and the critical investment in broadband connectivity it brings to constituents.

All Americans, whether in rural or urban areas, should be able to benefit from the ever-expanding online world we find ourselves in today. We use broadband for nearly everything in our lives – from accessing a bank account and submitting homework assignments to filing taxes and remaining active in our faith community. The ACP equips millions of families in communities across America with affordable access to the resources of the online world each month.

When Congress enacted the ACP as part of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021, you upheld your responsibility to address America's digital divide. But millions of rural Americans *still* face financial

challenges to obtaining acceptable internet connectivity. Failing to renew this key benefit program would be an upsetting step backward and a slight to one of Congress' key commitments.

Overwhelmingly, rural communities' connectivity has been categorized as a long-term problem to address. These Americans have been overlooked as lawmakers view the digital divide through the simplistic, narrow lens of "who can we help with the most immediate impact". This is because the historical narrative around broadband access holds that households are unconnected because they simply lack access to high-speed internet infrastructure. Indeed, broadband deployment has been toughest in hard-to-reach areas, which in turn causes high costs for internet on rural consumers. However, the ACP has alleviated such high costs through providing a discount. This affordability initiative ensures the billions of federal dollars that Congress and The White House have designated to states help build out more broadband infrastructure, through the Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program, are going to have a tangible impact for the Americans who need it most.

The FCC's enrollment data on ACP has also proven that the digital divide is as much of an affordability issue as it is an access issue. Of the twenty-eight million households in the U.S. that lack broadband internet in their home, eighteen million households say it is simply because they cannot afford an internet connection. That is *forty-seven million Americans* who will continue to remain on the wrong side of the digital divide, simply because they lack affordable Internet. With only 20.5 million subscribers already taking advantage of this \$30/month consumer program of the 51 million eligible, it's imperative that Congress continues funding for the ACP to keep our families connected to the world and continue getting even more rural communities connected as well.

Once more, polling has shown internet connectivity is a very strong bipartisan issue, with Democrats, Republicans and Independents overwhelmingly supporting Congressional renewal of the ACP this year. According to a national survey from the Digital Progress Institute, 78 percent of voters support continuing the ACP, including 64 percent of Republicans, 70 percent of Independents, and 95 percent of Democrats. 68 percent of rural, suburban, and urban households also support continuing the program.

Limiting the ACP to such short-lived and modest success would not only prevent further rural households from benefiting from the ACP – but it may also cause the millions who currently rely on this program to lose trust in Washington. We urge you to consider the diverse groups this program benefits and who will suffer if it is not funded once more: Farmers, ranchers, women, black and tribal-owned businesses, small-town artisans, and more. Broadband internet is vital to these communities— this incredible opportunity to get America online shouldn't be wasted.

A real, positive impact has been made on the lives of many of your constituents because of the ACP. As you address longer-term challenges to funding broadband connectivity, we ask you to renew your commitment to close the digital divide and ensure all Americans have the opportunity to access a high-speed broadband connection in their home now.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. We stand ready to assist in whatever way we can.

Sincerely,

Justin Tupper,  
President,  
U.S. Cattlemen's Association

Jack Alexander,  
Chairman,  
Rural & Agriculture Council of America

Betsy Huber  
President  
National Grange

Tina Metzger  
Co-Founder  
RuralRISE Tech