



February 13, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

I would like to thank you for your leadership on behalf of more than 23 million rural Americans who remain on the wrong side of the digital divide. As you have noted, the lack of broadband access in rural America “leaves human capital on the shelves.” We could not agree more, which is why we founded Connect Americans Now (CAN). We are a coalition committed to closing the digital divide by 2022, and some of our members include Microsoft, the National Parent Teacher Association, The National Grange and the National Rural Education Association.

Today, it is estimated that 6.5 million students lack access to high-speed internet, but 70 percent of teachers assign homework that requires a broadband connection. Unable to keep up with their assignments or master the computer skills that are critical in the modern workforce, millions of rural students begin their education at a severe disadvantage to their urban counterparts.

But this issue impacts many sectors of the U.S. economy. Without access to the digital superhighway, farmers are unable to take advantage of cost-saving precision agriculture tools that can transform their operations, small businesses are locked out of the global economy and rural hospitals lack lifesaving telemedicine capabilities.

I could go on citing facts and statistics that show why we need to close the digital divide, but you already appreciate the impact this issue has on millions of Americans. While you have certainly been a champion for each of them, I am writing today to encourage you to take concrete steps to support innovative solutions that can finally solve this critical issue.

At CAN, we have an actionable plan to close the digital divide by 2022 by utilizing a combination of solutions that bring multiple stakeholders to the table, including fiber-based, satellite and wireless technologies, leveraging a range of frequencies including TV white spaces.

However, the FCC must take definitive action to make this plan a reality. Specifically, it is critical to ensure that three channels below 700 MHz are available for wireless use on an unlicensed basis in every market in the country.



This regulatory certainty would allow local service providers, equipment vendors and chip manufacturers to quicken the pace of their investments, mass produce lower-cost equipment, and bring connectivity into small businesses, homes, schools, clinics, and farms across the heartland.

By leveraging TV white spaces and other unlicensed technologies in rural areas, we can reduce the cost of bridging the digital divide by 80 percent when compared to fiber solutions alone. That cost savings means that we can close the digital divide in the next five years, delivering a life-changing opportunity to rural residents who have lagged their city dwelling counterparts for far too long.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts on TV white space technology.

Sincerely,

Richard T. Cullen

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard T. Cullen', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Executive Director, Connect Americans Now