



November 9, 2020

Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Connect Americans Now (CAN) writes to commend your long-standing commitment to expanding broadband connectivity for the millions of Americans stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide. CAN is a coalition of more than 275 organizations and companies representing voices for agriculture, health care, education, small business, technology, veterans, rural advocacy and more — committed to completely and swiftly eliminating the digital divide in America by supporting a mixed-technology approach that leverages the full potential of every tool in the nation's toolkit.

In the 21st century economy, classroom and health care setting, broadband connectivity is as essential as electricity or water. Yet, too many Americans remain stuck behind the digital divide without access to broadband internet or without the means to afford reliable service. For the millions of Americans who lack access to a broadband connection, the pandemic has exacerbated the many challenges associated with the digital divide. Students without broadband at home can struggle to keep up with remote learning and those who have returned to in-person class still must grapple with the homework gap. Patients may be unable to access telehealth solutions that can keep them healthy and allow them to avoid strained facilities. A lack of access to broadband can mean a lack of access to specialists and IoT innovation in health care. Farmers and ranchers can be placed at a competitive disadvantage in a global market, unable to unlock the potential of precision agriculture technology and remote monitoring equipment that can optimize irrigation, conserve resources and increase yields.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) plays a critical role in implementing policies to bridge the digital divide.

In recent years, the FCC has taken commendable steps to address the broadband gap, including by: Maximizing spectrum resources and clearing regulatory barriers to innovative solutions like TV white space (TVWS); Advancing the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) to direct \$20.4 billion over ten years to finance broadband network deployment in unserved areas; Implementing targeted programs established by Congress to address known challenges like access to telehealth through the Connected Care Pilot and COVID-19 Telehealth Program; Protecting Americans' connectivity during the pandemic by issuing the Keep Americans Connected Pledge.



Your continued leadership in oversight of the FCC is essential to ensuring the Commission builds on this progress and takes every available step to connect unserved and underserved Americans to bridge the digital divide.

The confirmation of members of the Commission who share a commitment to maximizing spectrum resources, including licensed and unlicensed applications, clearing regulatory barriers to innovation, fixing the nation's mapping data on the digital divide and administering deployment funding guided by key principles, including neutrality toward technology, safeguards against overbuilding and rapid and cost-effective deployment, is of critical importance.

That is why CAN writes to you today, ahead of the Commission's scheduled hearing on November 10, 2020 to consider a nominee to the FCC, to respectfully offer key questions pertaining to broadband connectivity:

- During its October 27, 2020 Open Meeting, the FCC unanimously voted to adopt a Report and Order to update rules regarding TV white space technology. TV white spaces are unused spectrum in the UHF television bands that are particularly well adapted to broadband deployments in rural areas. This powerful bandwidth enables wireless signals to travel over hills and through buildings and trees, making TVWS particularly well-suited for areas of low population density and challenging topographies.
 - Do you support the adopted Report and Order on TVWS?
 - As a Commissioner, what will you do to ensure these rules are implemented as soon as possible and to continue to support the realization of the full potential of this innovative technology as a solution to expand connectivity?
 - What are the next steps the FCC should take to ensure there is adequate spectrum available to support the use of TVWS technology to enhance the reach and cost-effectiveness of broadband deployments?
- The most cost-effective approach to closing the digital divide in America involves a combination of “wired” and “wireless” technologies, including fiber-based technologies and terrestrial and satellite fixed and mobile wireless technologies, leveraging a range of frequencies. A study conducted by Boston Consulting Group found a hybrid network approach to closing the digital divide, leveraging every solution in the nation's toolkit, can reduce the cost by as much as 80 percent.
 - Do you believe funding mechanisms for broadband deployments and technology should be strictly technology-neutral and why?
- The FCC has made positive steps in recent years to maximize spectrum resources and clear regulatory barriers to innovation. In addition to the recent Report and Order on TVWS, the FCC has moved forward with plans to update rules surrounding the 6 GHz band and voted to make a portion of the 5.9 GHz band available for unlicensed broadband applications.
 - How can the FCC build upon these steps to ensure adequate licensed and unlicensed spectrum resources are utilized to help eliminate the digital divide and in what bands do you see the potential for further action to support broadband innovation and connectivity?



- More precise broadband maps to accurately measure the full scale of the digital divide will better direct public and private investments in broadband deployments. There is bipartisan consensus in Congress and at the FCC that the current FCC broadband data maps are inaccurate. Earlier this year, Congress passed on a bipartisan basis and President Trump signed into law the Broadband DATA Act which will help more accurately measure the full scale of the digital divide through improved mapping data.
 - As Commissioner, what steps would you take to ensure the full implementation of this bill and what barriers do you see to its swift implementation?
- What is your level of priority for eliminating the digital divide and what core principles would guide your approach to the issue of expanding broadband connectivity for unserved and underserved Americans?

Thank you for your consideration of these important questions and your ongoing leadership on the important issue of broadband connectivity. We look forward to continuing to work with you, members of the committee and the FCC to bridge the digital divide for all Americans.

Sincerely,

Richard Cullen
Executive Director
Connect Americans Now