

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS
On the Future of Universal Connectivity in America

This week, an appeals court ruled the current structure of the Universal Service Fund is unconstitutional. This decision puts at risk the high-speed connectivity of millions of rural and low-income Americans and the future trajectory of U.S. economic growth and global competitiveness. Now it's Congress's duty to promptly and decisively make clear the nation's unwavering commitment to affordable, universal connectivity.

For more than a generation, the USF programs have been essential to affordable connectivity for millions of rural and low-income Americans, tens of thousands of schools and libraries, as well as hospitals and health care providers that rely on these connections to serve their communities.

Simply put, the USF makes affordable broadband possible – especially in rural America. With USF funding, the many rural broadband companies we represent can overcome the massive cost barriers of deploying and maintaining high-cost network infrastructure in remote parts of our country. Without USF funding, one rural USTelecom member company estimates its customers would face a more than 200 percent increase in their broadband bills.

The court's fundamentally flawed decision hands Congress an enormously important opportunity to seize the initiative and ensure our nation's abiding commitment to universal service. The broadband connectivity that the USF enables in turn drives the entire U.S. technology and internet ecosystem. The stakes are unimaginably high for your constituents and continued U.S. leadership of an intensely competitive global information economy.

In Senate testimony in 2022, I warned that such a negative court outcome would be “a force majeure that would impact our nation's commitment to the future of universal connectivity.” We now face that moment, and we must act decisively. We simply cannot allow our national bipartisan commitment to universal service to be left behind in the dust bin of history.

Fortunately, diligent work has been underway in Congress to forge a sustainable path forward to a lean, effective and modern Universal Service Fund. That path means dramatically reducing the fees on consumer telephone bills by expanding the base of contributors to include the primary financial beneficiaries of universal connectivity. Those beneficiaries are the handful of Big Tech platforms that have long dominated the global internet but don't contribute to our shared national commitment to universal connectivity. Congress must move forward now with this modern and equitable funding approach, and remove any potential doubts regarding the future of these critical programs.

As an industry on the front lines of connecting our nation, USTelecom and its members will continue to put our shoulder to this great national initiative. You can count on our continued partnership in Washington and across the communities you serve to deliver the power and promise of broadband to all Americans.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Spalter