

# National Rural Assembly

## BROADBAND

March 24, 2015

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Chairman  
House Judiciary Committee  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
House Judiciary Committee  
2426 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers:

We are writing to ask you to support the fair treatment of rural and Native communities online. We are entrepreneurs, artists, educators, advocates, and devoted community members, and we strongly believe network neutrality rules provide us with a level playing field online. The open Internet has given us the opportunity to revitalize rural America's local economies, share our culture with global audiences, and amplify rural voices in debates shaping our society.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently voted in favor of strong net neutrality rules, a decision that ensures Broadband Internet Access Services (BIAS) treat all information equally – no one receives preferential treatment, no one is slowed down, and no one is blocked, regardless of where they live. The rules prevent service providers from choosing digital winners and losers, a practice that could disproportionately hurt rural Americans. In brief, net neutrality rules keep Broadband Internet Access Services honest. Indeed, the FCC decision is a great victory for rural America.

**We need your help as a Rural Champion: Support the Net Neutrality rules and maintain a level playing field for rural Americans.**

Your support for the FCC's net neutrality rules ensures that rural Americans don't get stuck in the slow lane and are able to access the power of the open Internet to transform our communities.

Today, residents of rural and Native communities constitute the majority of Americans who are unable to access telecommunications services. According to the FCC, 53% of rural Americans (22 million) and 63% of Americans living in Tribal lands do not have access to broadband speeds that enable full participation in our society.<sup>1</sup> This persistent digital divide keeps rural communities from better education, health care, economic development, and from full civic participation.

The open Internet helps bridge the isolation and neglect our communities experience. But getting online is not sufficient. In order for rural people to obtain the full benefits of the open Internet, our voices, stories, and ideas cannot be downgraded to the slow lane. Net neutrality helps rural communities get the same exposure as those with power and wealth. It creates a level playing field unlike we have ever seen.

As our economy, culture, and civic engagement become increasingly tied to our presence online, rural communities depend on network neutrality to get a fair shake. Here are some examples:

### **Rural Entrepreneurs**

Broadband provides rural businesses and innovators access to global customers. Net neutrality allows rural entrepreneurs and large corporations to compete for these customers on a level playing field. Allowing Broadband Internet Access Services to sell fast lanes to those who can afford them leaves rural businesses stuck in the digital dirt road. Net neutrality maintains the digital road to economic progress open for rural entrepreneurs.

### **Rural Artists**

The Internet exposes global audiences to rural art, music, stories, and culture. And rural musicians, filmmakers, journalists, and artists use the Internet to be our cultural ambassadors. While rural artists face many obstacles to reach mainstream stages, the Internet is their most accessible venue. Net neutrality rules help rural talent reach the global stage.

### **Rural Ideas**

The Internet is a platform where rural people can speak for themselves and on the behalf of their communities to wider audiences. Net neutrality grants every idea equal opportunity to reach a global audience, thus ensuring that rural communities are not excluded and do not experience the same lack of representation they face on other communications platforms. Net neutrality rules ensure rural voices get the same megaphone as everyone else.

The FCC listened to our requests to establish Net neutrality rules that help rural Americans obtain the full benefits of the open Internet, and now you can help us by protecting those rules.

The stakeholders endorsing this letter respectfully request your help establishing fairness for rural communities, entrepreneurs, and artists online by supporting the FCC's network neutrality rules.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tenth Broadband Progress Report*, Federal Communications Commission. January 29, 2015

Sincerely,

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CC: Members of the House Judiciary Committee