
September 10, 2018

Kenneth Johnson
Administrator
Rural Utilities Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Mail Stop 1516, Room 5135
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Western Governors appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Broadband e-Connectivity Pilot Program. We view RUS as a critical partner in helping to close the digital divide in rural communities across the West. Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution [2017-09, *Western Agriculture*](#), states, "Western Governors support the continued efforts of the Rural Utilities Service to provide financial assistance for... broadband connectivity in rural and remote areas, particularly in communities that have minimal or no such infrastructure."

As you are all too aware, many rural communities in the West lack adequate internet access. This leaves rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage and citizens without access to telework, telemedicine, and distance learning opportunities. Western Governors appreciate that RUS is committed to closing this digital divide.

The RUS-proposed definition of "eligible rural areas" would prioritize communities that either wholly or severely lack access to broadband. We recommend you consider innovative technologies such as TV White Spaces, that may be able to deliver broadband service to rural communities in a cost-effective manner.

The growth of innovative sectors (such as precision agriculture and e-commerce) that have the potential to promote rural prosperity depend on adequate broadband access. RUS should reward project applications that will deliver speeds that ensure rural communities can prosper now and into the future as their data transmission needs expand.

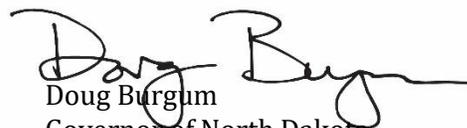
Western Governors are pleased that RUS does not solely rely on the Federal Communication Commission's recently updated broadband map, but has instead devised its own process to validate broadband availability claims. We encourage the Service to use technical assistance funds to engage engineers with technical expertise to precisely assess broadband coverage.

Western Governors are excited to see positive results of the Broadband e-Connectivity Pilot Program in our rural communities. Please let us know how we may assist you as meaningful partners in the design and delivery of this program.

Sincerely,



David Ige
Governor of Hawaii
Chair, WGA



Doug Burgum
Governor of North Dakota
Vice Chair, WGA