

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chairman Genachowski:

Minnesotans understand the importance of a strong rural economy not just for our state but for the health of the nation. Access to affordable, high quality communications services is critical for the rural communities that are drivers of Minnesota's economy. The Universal Service Fund (USF) and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) have played an important role in ensuring that every corner of our state gets and stays connected to the communications services that families, farmers, and businesses need to be competitive in the 21st century economy.

In Minnesota small telephone companies and cooperatives have been instrumental towards bringing broadband service to rural, high-cost areas in our state, which are some of the hardest areas to serve. We have supported the programs that enable this important investment in Minnesota, as well as the FCC's effort to reform USF to support broadband capable networks and better target scarce resources to the areas that need it most. We request that as the FCC continues to implement USF reform, both of your agencies work closely with each other. We also urge you to be cognizant of the unique challenges that many rural carriers will encounter as you implement this reform. RUS must help borrowers plan for the impact of reform and provide flexibility where needed if consumers are at risk of losing service.

Given the importance of collaboration between your agencies, we look forward to your joint response to these issues.

Sincerely,



Senator Amy Klobuchar



Senator Al Franken