



Davis and Spanberger Lead Bipartisan Effort to Expand Broadband Internet Access across Rural America

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Washington, DC- U.S. Reps. Rodney Davis (R-IL) and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) are leading a bipartisan effort requesting funding to expand rural broadband internet connectivity across rural America and to ensure equal educational and economic opportunities in rural communities.

According to the Federal Communications Commission's 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, more than 30 percent of Americans in rural areas lack access to fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps—compared to only 2 percent of Americans in urban areas.

To address this connectivity gap, Davis and Spanberger sent a bipartisan letter urging key House Appropriations Committee members to boost funding for rural broadband internet infrastructure. In their letter, the bipartisan group of colleagues stressed the immediate need to expand high-speed internet access for rural homes, schools, and businesses.

“Affordable broadband access is critical for the economic development of rural communities, enabling them to fully participate in the internet-based economy,” **the letter states.** “It enables farmers to use precision agriculture techniques, patients to access medical care remotely via telemedicine, children to conduct research for school projects, and business to engage with customers.”

The Davis and Spanberger-led letter calls for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies to provide \$550 million for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Program, which helps strengthen broadband internet connectivity and rural and underserved areas. Additionally, the letter requests \$350 million for the rural broadband loan and grant

program—an amount authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill. This funding would represent an overall increase of \$350 million in rural broadband development funding from fiscal year 2019.

“These programs play a role in meeting the goal of broadband access for all Americans, and therefore we request that the ReConnect Program receive level funding at the FY2019 level and the Farm Bill-authorized program receive funding at the authorized amount,” **the letter continues**. “We believe that support for these programs is critical to address the ‘digital divide’ and ensure that our rural communities have equal access to opportunity.”

The letter led by Davis and Spanberger was cosigned by 71 additional Democrats and Republicans. [Click here](#) to read the full letter.

Full text of the full letter is as follows:

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry,

As you consider Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations, we write to you to request \$550 million for USDA’s ReConnect Program and \$350 million for the rural broadband loan and grant program authorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

Affordable broadband access is critical for the economic development of rural communities, enabling them to fully participate in the internet-based economy. It enables farmers to use precision agriculture techniques, patients to access medical care remotely via telemedicine, children to conduct research for school projects, and businesses to engage with customers. Yet, according to the FCC’s 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, more than 30% of Americans in rural areas lack access to fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, compared to only 2% of Americans in urban areas.

In FY2018 and FY2019, Congress appropriated \$600 million and \$550 million, respectively, for a pilot broadband loan and grant program. This program was launched in December 2018 by USDA as the ReConnect Rural Broadband Program, and addresses one of the core recommendations of President Trump’s Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. In the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, better known as the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress authorized \$350 million per year for a broadband loan and grant program. We are requesting funding for both of these

programs: \$550 million for the ReConnect Program and \$350 million for the broadband loan and grant program authorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

These programs play a role in meeting the goal of broadband access for all Americans, and therefore we request that the ReConnect Program receive level funding at the FY2019 level and the Farm Bill-authorized program receive funding at the authorized amount. We believe that support for these programs is critical to address the “digital divide” and ensure that our rural communities have equal access to opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.