

Questions for the Record from Senator Roger Wicker
To
Mr. Steve Berry

Question 1. Late last year Commissioner Clyburn and members of your staff visited my home state to look at some of the amazing things Mississippi is doing to lead the way on telemedicine. They visited Ruleville in Sunflower County – in the middle of the Mississippi Delta, not too far from Mr. Seward’s farm. There in rural Mississippi a groundbreaking telemedicine program is treating and defeating Type II diabetes. The program depends upon USF supported, robust mobile broadband connections to allow patients to interact with medical professionals around the clock from their home or work.

Do you believe the FCC has done enough to ensure that sufficient USF support remains available to keep existing rural wireless networks up and running – enabling access to these critical life-saving and cost-saving advances in medicine – especially in rural states like mine? How could the FCC do better?

Answer: When the FCC adopted the 2011 USF Transformation Order, it included a transition mechanism from legacy identical support for wireless carriers to a new Mobility Fund. This fund was to be employed in two phases to ensure that sufficient support is available to preserve existing rural wireless service, like the service you mention in Mississippi, as well expand new mobile technologies and services. Importantly, the FCC added a protection mechanism to this transition. The FCC planned to phase down legacy support over a five-year period at 20% per year. However, if the second phase of the Mobility Fund (Mobility Fund Phase II) was not operational by the time the phase down reached 60% by June 30, 2014, the FCC agreed to pause the phase down to protect rural consumers benefitting from legacy universal service support and to prevent a reduction or loss of wireless service. That pause remains in place today, providing carriers serving rural areas with support and consumers with ongoing wireless service.

Going forward, it is important for the FCC to recognize and affirm that USF support will be made available at sufficient and predictable levels for wireless carriers to preserve existing rural wireless networks as well as expand the latest mobile broadband services in areas that are unserved or underserved. Support for both preservation and expansion of mobile broadband is necessary to meet Congress’s mandate to provide reasonably comparable services in urban and rural areas alike.

Questions for the Record from Senator Dan Sullivan

To

Mr. Steve Berry

Question 1. In your testimony, you mention carriers that have had to sell part or all of their operations due to uncertainty in funding. As you may know, some of our carriers in Alaska are nearing this point. I am sure you are aware of the proposal set forth by the Alaska Telephone Association targeted specifically to Alaska rate of return carriers. Can you please discuss the challenges for these carriers posed by uncertain funding mechanisms? Can you also discuss how CCA addresses the needs of Alaskan consumers?

Answer: As CCA has told the FCC, CCA supports the adoption of the Alaska Telephone Association plan. The Alaska Telephone Association includes several CCA members that provide life-saving mobile wireless services in these hard-to-serve areas, and the plan is tailored to Alaska's unique needs and situation. Stable funding mechanisms are critical for all carriers to preserve, expand and upgrade voice and broadband services. All carriers deserve certainty regarding what funding mechanisms will be available so they can maintain, upgrade, and expand their networks, and all consumers demand certainty that services they rely on will be available. The Alaska Telephone Association's proposal would provide a fixed amount of support for 10 years to mobile and rate-of-return carriers in Alaska, and require them to make specific commitments to upgrade and maintain advanced mobile networks. The proposal strikes the right balance for carriers and consumers alike, and the FCC should adopt the proposal for the benefit of all Alaska carriers and consumers.