

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2021

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Yellen:

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of connectivity. For the past year, millions of Americans have depended on broadband for work, education, and health care. However, approximately 14.5 million Americans still lack access to a broadband connection and are therefore cut off from these remote activities.¹ To address this disparity, the federal government has myriad programs spread across multiple agencies—most notably the Federal Communications Commission, the Department of Agriculture, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration—to support the expansion of broadband.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 added the Department of the Treasury to the list of agencies tackling the digital divide. That law tasked Treasury with distributing \$350 billion to state and local governments to “make necessary investments in . . . broadband infrastructure.”² It also established a \$10 billion Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund that will allow states, territories, and Tribal governments to “carry out critical capital projects directly enabling work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options.”³

Interagency coordination is critical to bridging the digital divide. This is especially important given the multiple agencies that support broadband deployment. Without coordination of these efforts, agencies risk wasting scarce federal resources, duplicating support provided by another agency, or overbuilding a project already subsidized by federal dollars or private investment. Such waste leaves millions of Americans unserved, undermining the very purpose of these programs. Recently, Congress recognized the need for stronger interagency coordination and enacted two laws, the Broadband Interagency Coordination Act and the ACCESS BROADBAND Act, aimed at improving coordination and program efficiency.⁴

¹ Federal Communications Commission, *Inquiry Concerning Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion*, Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report, GN Docket No. 20-269 at Fig. 1 (rel. Jan. 19, 2021), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-18A1.pdf>.

² American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2, tit. IX, sub. M, § 9901 (2021), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, div. FF, tit. IX, §§ 903, 904 (2020).

The Hon. Janet Yellen

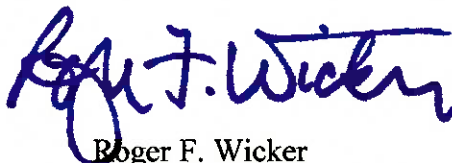
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As Treasury launches its new programs, I urge the Department to follow Congress's direction and coordinate its efforts with the other federal agencies supporting broadband deployment. Treasury needs to ensure that its funding goes to communities that are truly unserved. This can be achieved by coordinating funding decisions to make sure funding is not going to areas that already have broadband service or pending funding, as well as by reaching a consensus definition of "unserved." Absent these steps, the country will continue to face a digital divide as millions of Americans will continue to live without the benefits of a broadband connection. We should not squander this important opportunity to provide more Americans with connectivity.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you to get Americans connected.

Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation

CC: The Hon. Jessica Rosenworcel, Acting Chairwoman, FCC
The Hon. Gina M. Raimondo, Secretary, Department of Commerce
The Hon. Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary, Department of Agriculture
The Hon. Evelyn Remaley, Acting Administrator, NTIA