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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of connectivity. During the extended periods of lockdown and restrictions, millions of Americans depended on broadband for work, education, and health care. However, approximately 14.5 million Americans still lack access to a broadband connection and have not been able to engage in these activities remotely. In an effort to address the impact of the digital divide during the pandemic, Congress spent billions of dollars to fund multiple programs across the federal government that support the expansion of broadband connectivity and services. It is critical that both Congress and the agencies ensure that these funds are distributed in a way that avoids overbuilding, duplication of funding, and wasteful spending.

Among those programs was the Broadband ReConnect program at the Department of Agriculture, which received \$100 million in additional funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in March 2020 and \$635 million in additional funding through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. As you know, the ReConnect program is intended to provide loans and grants for the deployment of broadband networks in rural America.

In order to ensure that federal funds are being utilized fully and efficiently, we request that you provide a detailed accounting of how these coronavirus relief funds have been used. This includes:

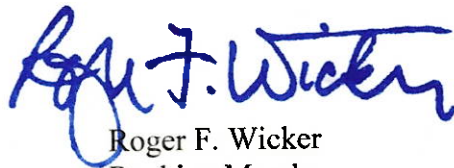
1. Funds that have been awarded and transferred to the recipients;
2. Funds that have been obligated or awarded but not yet transferred; and
3. Funds that have not yet been obligated, awarded, or transferred.

In your responses to each of these questions, please provide specific dollar amounts, dates where applicable, and recipient information. For funds that have not yet been obligated, awarded, or transferred, please provide a timeline for when you anticipate these actions taking place.

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. I request a response as soon as possible, but no later than July 7, 2021.

Sincerely,



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