

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Baldwin, Thune lead a dozen bipartisan colleagues in pushing the FCC to increase speed and expand access to broadband

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and John Thune (R-SD) led a bipartisan group of colleagues in pushing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to take action to increase broadband speed requirements in its existing programs so that Americans, particularly in rural and underserved areas, have access to the download and upload speeds necessary to participate in telehealth, telework, and remote learning.

The Senators wrote, “Without agency action, the FCC risks leaving Americans in rural areas behind. We respectfully urge the FCC to take action to enhance these programs as soon as possible. Doing so will position the FCC to better respond to the needs of our constituents living and working in rural high-cost areas. We appreciate your work to bring fast, reliable, and affordable broadband to every American.”

The FCC is considering proposals to update two programs – the Alternative Connect American Cost Model (ACAM) and Connect America Fund Broadband Loop Support (CAF-BLS) – that help connect people in rural America to affordable broadband services that are provided by local, smaller telecom companies. These updates, which would extend financial support in exchange for commitments to serve more people at higher broadband speeds, would connect thousands more Wisconsinites to the kind of internet service necessary to participate in Wisconsin’s modern digital economy.

The letter urges the FCC to move forward with updates to these programs that would give more Wisconsinites access to higher-speed broadband than what is currently required.

“WSTA appreciates the leadership of Senators Tammy Baldwin and John Thune as they encourage the FCC to adopt ACAM enhancements and CAF BLS updates,” **said Bill Esbeck, Executive Director of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association.** “Moving forward with both proposals will facilitate additional broadband deployment and ensure continued network sustainability and reliability. Senators Baldwin and Thune should be commended for their support of rural broadband providers across the country.”

“On behalf of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association and the rural, community-based providers we represent, I thank Senators Tammy Baldwin and John Thune for leading a letter, along with other Senators, encouraging the FCC to move forward with updates to the Alternative Connect America Model and Connect America Fund-Broadband Loop Support mechanisms. The updates under consideration would ensure more widespread access to better broadband on a more affordable and sustainable basis for millions of rural Americans, accelerating efforts to close the digital divide and complementing the early stage efforts to promote broadband deployment just beginning at other agencies,” **said Shirley Bloomfield, CEO NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association.**

The letter was also signed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Deb Fischer (R-NE), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and Gary Peters (D-MI).

Full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below.

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

We appreciate the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) examination of the ACAM Broadband Coalition’s proposal to modify and update the Alternative Connect America Cost Model (ACAM) high-cost Universal Service Fund (USF) support program, and the FCC’s proposal to make permanent changes to the Connect America Fund Broadband Loop Support (CAF-BLS) high-cost program.

Recognizing the importance of reliable broadband services, comments in response

to the FCC's rulemaking notice demonstrate strong support to facilitate access to modern upload and download speeds and to ensure both the sustainability of networks once built and the affordability of services atop them. For that reason, we respectfully urge the FCC to move forward to update the ACAM and CAF-BLS programs as soon as possible.

Since their creation, high-cost USF programs like ACAM and CAF-BLS have delivered affordable broadband service to millions of rural Americans. However, there is more to do to reach consumers in the areas these programs target as the speeds in these programs are in need of an update, with maximum required download speeds that limit household access to technologies like telework, telehealth, and distance learning. Without agency action, the FCC risks leaving Americans in rural areas behind.

We respectfully urge the FCC to take action to enhance these programs as soon as possible. Doing so will position the FCC to better respond to the needs of our constituents living and working in rural high-cost areas. We appreciate your work to bring fast, reliable, and affordable broadband to every American. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

An online version of the release is available [here](#).