

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
S-230 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
S-221 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
H-232 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
H-204 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leaders Schumer, McConnell, and McCarthy:

As Congress considers a fourth coronavirus relief package, it is critical that we include funding for broadband infrastructure to expand broadband deployment in rural and tribal communities across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to broadband for American families. Without broadband, distance learning and working remotely are nearly impossible. However, in communities across the country, the infrastructure to deploy broadband simply does not exist. Without this infrastructure, companies cannot expand their broadband coverage to unserved Americans.

By investing in broadband infrastructure, the federal government can both support broadband deployment when it is most needed and invest in communities to help their economies recover. This funding should make low-interest financing available to communities and public-private partnerships to help deploy broadband. These funds can be used to allow public-private partnerships to apply for secured loans, lines of credit, or loan guarantees for broadband infrastructure investments. This funding would create new financing opportunities for local businesses, many of which are struggling, to provide broadband service to unserved and underserved Americans.

Millions of Americans are suddenly being asked to work from home and attend school online. Many small businesses are operating entirely remotely. Yet 31% of rural Americans do not have access to broadband.¹ This statistic disproportionately represents communities of color; 27% of people of color in rural areas are unserved.² The impact is also great on our students, 18% of whom lack broadband access.³ That number is significantly higher for students in rural areas. Finally, 32% of Americans living on Tribal lands lack access to high-speed internet at home.⁴ These numbers are unacceptable and too many communities have been left behind. We must invest in broadband infrastructure now.

¹ <https://www.publicknowledge.org/issues/rural-broadband-access/>

² https://www.publicknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Rural_Broadband_Racial_Justice_Fact_Sheet.pdf

³ <https://www.businessinsider.my/us-cities-with-lowest-share-of-computer-and-broadband-internet-2020-3-2>

⁴ <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-19-44A1.pdf>

As we continue to navigate this crisis, we must do what we can to support both local businesses and Americans adapting to new circumstances for working and learning. By creating partnerships with local companies for broadband deployment, we can play in role in supporting Americans during this challenging time.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary C. Peters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Ray Lujan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Ben Ray Lujan
Member of Congress