

United States Senate

February 1, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

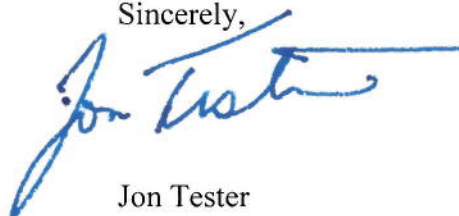
I write to you regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee Program and recent reports that only three applications were approved over the past three years. I am very concerned about the undersubscription of this program and would like a full explanation of why USDA only granted three loans over this time period. Broadband access is increasingly vital to families and businesses across Montana. Given the importance of broadband deployment, I am asking for an update on this initiative and any factors and barriers that limit its full utilization.

Broadband is essential to our way of life in Montana and rural America. It supports a wide range of activities with direct benefits to individuals, businesses and communities—such as healthcare delivery, education, commerce and economic development, and workforce training. The goal of the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee program is to ensure that Americans in rural communities have access to affordable and reliable broadband. However, reports about the limited usage of this program raises significant questions about USDA's management and implementation.

The Farm Bill expires in September. In the coming months, I look forward to working with you to enhance USDA's ability to help rural communities get connected to high-speed internet service. Access to high-speed internet is critical to leading the 21st century global economy. If we don't take action now, our businesses and workers will be at a severe disadvantage to countries like China which have made major infrastructure investments.

I look forward to your input on how to improve USDA broadband loan programs in the coming months. We must make sure that USDA resources are being fully utilized in order to achieve our shared goal to deploy broadband throughout Montana and other rural communities across the nation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester