

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2021

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Secretary Raimondo,

As the Department of Commerce seeks to address supply chain vulnerabilities and establish a domestic manufacturing base for 21st century technologies¹, we urge you to consider shortages impacting the availability of communications network equipment needed to connect unserved Americans and close the digital divide. It is our understanding that rural broadband providers in our districts and across the country are facing extensive delays to secure adequate supplies of fiber-optic cables, including shortages of optical network terminals, routers, and other communications equipment needed for installation². To facilitate the deployment of rural broadband, we urge the Department of Commerce to identify opportunities to secure the domestic manufacturing of fiber-optic cable and other technologies that are essential to connecting unserved rural Americans.

Economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with increased demand for broadband enabling equipment, has likely exhausted fragile supply chains³. Rural broadband providers in our communities and across the country are currently investing billions of dollars to meet consumer data demands yet are now facing steep delays in obtaining the equipment necessary to do so⁴. It is our understanding that some providers are scheduled to wait over twelve months to secure the spools of fiber and other communications equipment necessary to complete ongoing infrastructure projects.

Without increased domestic production of the equipment necessary to deploy high quality broadband, closing the digital divide may remain dependent on untrusted foreign suppliers. As

¹ White House, Building Resilient Supply Chains, *Revitalizing American Manufacturing, and Fostering Broad-Based Growth* (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/100-day-supply-chain-review-report.pdf>) (June 2021)

² NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association, *Federal Communications Commission WT Docket No. 21-195: In the Matter of Impact of the Global Semiconductor Shortage on the U.S. Communications Sector*, (https://www.ntca.org/sites/default/files/federal-filing/2021-06/06_10.21%20NTCA%20Equipment%20Shortage%20Comments%20WT%20Dkt%2021-195_FINAL.pdf) (June 10, 2021)

³ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *Building a More Resilient ICT Supply Chain: Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, (https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/lessons-learned-during-covid-19-pandemic_508_2.pdf) (Nov. 2020)

⁴ *Id.*

we are seeing ongoing shortages of semiconductor chips stifle American manufacturing, we cannot allow the same situation to impede critical broadband infrastructure deployment.

For too long, unconnected Americans have lost out on economic opportunities only attainable in communities afforded with access to 21st century technologies. Connecting patients to health care providers remotely, accessing online education, and remote tele-work opportunities are only a few examples of the benefits behind broadband connectivity. To ensure that reliable and trusted sources of communications technology, including fiber-optic cable and other communications equipment, are available for continued broadband infrastructure deployment, we urge the Department of Commerce to seek opportunities to leverage domestic manufacturing and establish the reliable supply chain necessary to connect unserved parts of our country.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter and we stand ready to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Greg Pence
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



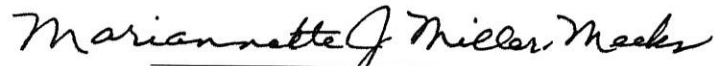
Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Marianette Miller-Meeks, M.D.
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress



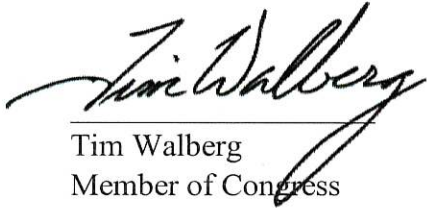
Tom Rice
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
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Lisa McClain
Member of Congress



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



Victoria Spartz
Member of Congress



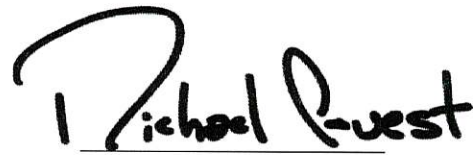
Larry Bucshon, M.D.
Member of Congress



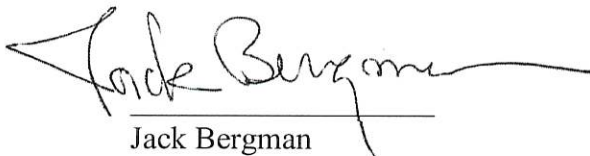
Glenn Grothman
Member of Congress



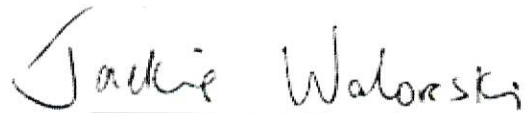
Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Michael Guest
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Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Jackie Walorski
Member of Congress