



## **REGIONAL ECONOMIC ALLIANCE**

Building an Economic Vision for Northwest Minnesota

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4225 Technology Drive NW  
Bemidji, MN 56601

February 12, 2010

The Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

The Northwest Minnesota Regional Economic Alliance (REA) writes to support proposed changes to the federal Universal Service Fund that will expand rural broadband deployment. Initially, the Universal Service Fund was established to ensure affordable, reliable telephone access for every American, including those in sparsely populated, high-cost areas. The Fund has been a success story this country can be proud of. Today, almost everyone in the United States has access to affordable and reliable telephone service.

However, our country has evolved since the early days of telecommunications. Indeed, the whole world has evolved since then. Universal telephone service is no longer enough for our rural communities and economies to survive. Commerce, health care, and education are all becoming more and more dependent on broadband connectivity.

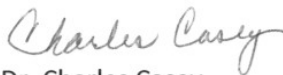
The REA is a dedicated group of Northwest Minnesota leaders representing diverse interests and working together for the region's economic success. The REA includes representatives from the public and private sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, banking, energy, tribal government, higher education, K-12 schools, economic and workforce development, and philanthropy. Adequate broadband service is critical to the economic vitality of our rural regions. It is imperative that national policies support development and deployment of broadband service in rural, sparsely populated and high-cost regions such as ours. Without national policies that support broadband, we fear that Northwest Minnesota and other rural areas of our nation will be increasingly at a disadvantage.

The current Universal Service Fund model has proven to be a success. The model now needs to be expanded and extended beyond telephony to include broadband accessibility. The model is in place. Fund collection and distribution methods are in place. Audit and abuse safeguards are in place. The Universal Service Fund works.

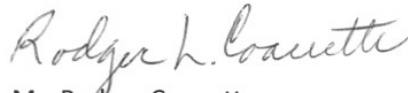
Now is the time to expand and extend the current Universal Service Fund model to include broadband accessibility. Please take these comments into consideration as you draft a National Broadband Plan.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, please feel free to contact Nancy Vyskocil, President of the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, 218-759-2057 or [nancyv@nwmf.org](mailto:nancyv@nwmf.org).

Sincerely,  
Members of the Regional Economic Alliance



Dr. Charles Casey  
Chancellor  
University of Minnesota Crookston



Mr. Rodger Coquette  
Executive Director, Northwest Minnesota  
Private Industry Council



Mr. Brent Gish  
Superintendent  
Red Lake Schools



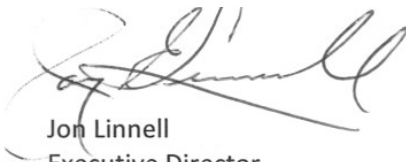
Mr. Robert Hager  
President  
Border State Bank



Mr. Leon Heath  
Executive Director, Northwest Regional  
Development Commission



Mr. Gary Johnson  
COO, Paul Bunyan Rural  
Telephone Cooperative



Jon Linnell  
Executive Director  
North Region Health Alliance



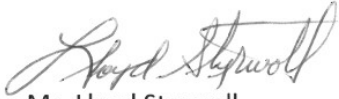
Dr. Jon Quistgaard  
President  
Bemidji State University



Mr. Richard Sjoberg  
President  
Sjoberg's Inc.



Mr. Mike St. Onge  
North Valley President  
Alerus Financial



Mr. Lloyd Styrwoll  
Executive Director  
Northwest Service Cooperative



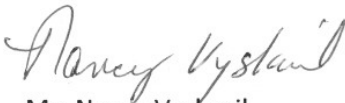
Dr. Anne Temte  
President, Northland Community and  
Technical College



Mr. Cliff Tweedale  
Executive Director, Headwaters Regional  
Development Commission



Dr. Erma Vizenor  
Chairwoman  
White Earth Reservation Tribal Council



Ms. Nancy Vyskocil  
President  
Northwest Minnesota Foundation



Mr. Dan Wenner  
Executive Director, Rural Minnesota  
Concentrated Employment Program