United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 13, 2013

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) works to finalize rules for the inaugural voluntary incentive spectrum auction, we encourage the FCC to consider the critical role of translators and low-power television stations in delivering over-the-air television to our nation's rural communities. Countless farmers and ranchers, small businesses and families living in remote areas rely on receiving over-the-air television through translators and low-power televisions stations. With this is mind, we ask the FCC to minimize the impacts of repacking spectrum in rural areas following the upcoming incentive spectrum auction.

In the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act (P.L. 112-96), Congress authorized the FCC to conduct the first-ever voluntary spectrum incentive auction. However, the Act did not contain specific provisions regarding the importance of maintaining over-the-air television networks in rural, mountainous or otherwise hard-to-reach areas that depend on translators or low-power television stations. Across our vast prairies and mountain ranges, our constituents rely on over-the-air television to access vital news programming, weather updates, emergency announcements and educational and entertainment content.

Television translators and low-power television stations are deployed across the nation to extend the reach of full-power stations or to provide over-the-air service where it wouldn't exist otherwise. In fact, there are over 4,000 translators across the country and over 2,000 low-power television stations. Furthermore, translators often operate as a network by relaying programming to the hardest-to-reach corners of our country. We implore the Commission to take a careful approach to repacking so as not upset these carefully constructed daisy chains.

While we recognize that the repacking process will inevitably lead to changes for translators and low-power television stations, we urge the FCC to ensure that access to quality over-the-air television is preserved. Translators and low-power television stations are often owned and operated by small local entities that cannot afford retooling with their limited resources. That's why it is crucial for the FCC to take into account the unique challenges of updating translators and low-power television stations after repacking spectrum.

We believe these important broadcasting issues can be addressed without delaying the spectrum auction as the auction is essential to developing public safety networks and mobile broadband services. We respectfully request a response addressing the efforts of the FCC to ensure the millions of rural viewers in our states are protected. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Jon Tester
United States Senator

Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator

Michael Enzi
United States Senator

Max Baucus
United States Senator

Mike Crapo
United States Senator

Tim Johnson
United States Senator

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Mark Udall
United States Senator

Richard Burr
United States Senator

Kay R. Hagan
United States Senator

Jeff Merkley
United States Senator

Michael Bennet
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Dean Heller
United States Senator

John McCain
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John Barrasso, M.D.
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Mike Johanns
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James Risch
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John Hoeven
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Jeff Flake
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