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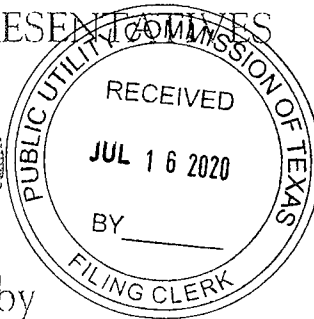


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Drew Darby

DISTRICT 72

COKE • CONCHO • GLASSCOCK • HOWARD • IRION • REAGAN • RUNNELS • STERLING • TOM GREEN

July 9, 2020

Ms. DeAnn T. Walker  
Chairman  
Public Utility Commission of Texas  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78711

**COPY**

Dear Chairman Walker,

Thank you for leadership on the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) during this unprecedented time for Texas and our nation.

During the ongoing public health and economic crises, it is extremely important that Texans have reliable, affordable access to connectivity. Dependable connectivity is important across the entire state, but most critical to Texans in rural areas, like my district, which is comprised primarily of nine rural West Texas counties. The Universal Service Fund (USF) is a very important part of sustaining and growing connectivity in rural Texas.

It is my understanding that the PUC recently had the opportunity to keep the USF solvent, but opted not to take action. This decision could have lasting and profound, devastating ramifications to over half of our state. If the USF were insolvent, I am very concerned that several of our small, local telephone companies, many of whom are telephone cooperatives originally created because their service areas were underserved or lacked any service at all, will simply close.

The PUC has several options at its disposal to keep the USF viable, which include increasing the assessment, changing the applicability of the assessments to include Voice over Internet Protocol or other Internet based calls, or shifting from a revenue based assessment to a per connection based assessment. All of these can be accomplished by rule and do not require legislative action. Several statutes and prior precedents require the PUC to fund universal service, and I would ask that you follow the current law and expeditiously fund the USF. Any legislative solution will come too late and waiting for legislative action during the 87th Legislature would be irresponsible to the rural Texans who depend on these daily critical services. However, if further legislative action is required, I am prepared to stand with rural Texans both in my district and beyond in providing solutions for their connectivity needs.

Again, I appreciate the leadership of the PUC during this time, and I trust you will take swift action to ensure that current law is followed and that all of Texas keeps the connectivity that is so desperately needed.

Sincerely,

Drew Darby

CC: Mr. Arthur C. D'Andrea, Commissioner, Public Utility Commission of Texas  
Ms. Shelly Botkin, Commissioner, Public Utility Commission of Texas