



MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU® FEDERATION  
*The Voice of Agriculture®*

Mike McCormick  
President

June 22, 2020

The Honorable Philip Gunn  
Office of the Speaker of the House  
400 High Street  
Jackson, MS 39201

Dear Speaker Gunn:

Connectivity has been one of the most discussed topics by our membership since I took office almost six years ago. Rural Mississippians need connectivity for education, telemedicine, precision agriculture, and quality of life. My staff and I have spent a great amount of time talking with internet service providers and the Electric Cooperatives on the challenge of bringing high-speed internet to rural Mississippi, and I understand the issues ahead. Speaking for Mississippi's farmers, ranchers, and rural Mississippians, thank you for your work in creating a plan to allocate funding towards broadband throughout our state. We hope to see this funding come to fruition.

Mississippi Farm Bureau's mission is to create an environment in which Mississippi farmers, ranchers, and Farm Bureau members can have a better life and make a better living. Rural Mississippi faces many challenges, and COVID-19 exposed how acute some of these challenges are to our citizenry. Access to high-speed internet can help alleviate some of those obstacles.

Education is essential to our membership from their children to extension education for farmers. One of our rural member's son, who normally excels in math, received a failing grade on an assignment during COVID. His mother followed up and figured out his assignment didn't download completely. His work was great, but lack of connectivity failed him.

On the medical front, telemedicine brings world-class medicine to the most rural areas of our state. The medical field has changed drastically over the last few years. More and more specialists are living in metro areas, and often, it is difficult to get away from the farm to see a specialist. With terminal or acute ailments, travel is a challenge by itself. The ability to connect with a physician in minutes instead of hours could save lives.

Agriculture is the number one industry in the state. The stereotypes of our industry being about an open cab tractor and a backyard garden have been replaced by GPS navigation, precision application of fertilizer and irrigation, and advanced seed technology. Just last year, I was named to a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Taskforce on connectivity where I lead a working group on precision agriculture. Our farmers need connectivity so they can reduce pesticide waste, increase irrigation efficiency, and ultimately increase yields which helps move Mississippi's economy. Access to broadband is essential for farmers and ranchers to follow commodity markets, communicate with

their customers, gain access to new markets around the world, and increasingly for regulatory compliance. Without broadband connectivity, our farmers are decades behind their neighbors with that access.

Lastly, connectivity increases rural Mississippians quality of life. Small towns throughout Mississippi are drying up in front of our eyes. I live close to Rodney, a famous ghost town in Southwest Mississippi. I don't want to see more Rodney's. I want to see our small towns and rural communities flourish. I want our young people to come home when they graduate and invest in their towns. This is only possible if these communities have access to high-speed internet. According to the FCC, 39 percent of rural Americans lack access to 25 Mbps/3 Mbps service compared to only 4 percent of urban Americans. In addition to that number, the 25 Mbps/3 Mbps service is falling further behind as the marker of "high speed."

Determining the areas needing this service most presents opportunities for debate. The FCC says nearly all of Mississippi is covered with access to mobile broadband with only a few small pockets in the state without access. We all know these numbers are questionable, and the FCC is working to determine the best way to find coverage. Further, even though there are connectivity options in rural Mississippi, some of these ISP options are costly and ineffective.

I have talked with the Electric Cooperatives, CSpire, AT&T, and other service providers, and I hope the opportunity to provide service to rural Mississippi is given to all who have a desire and ability to cover the cropland, pastureland, and tree farms of the state. We hope as you work towards a plan to help fund connectivity for Mississippi that you focus on rural areas of the state.

Without broadband connectivity, agriculture cannot reach the industry's full potential. This has a trickledown effect to the rest of the economy, which effects education, healthcare, and quality of life. Our desire is for rural areas of the state to have access to high-speed internet, and I believe the funding opportunity of today presents the state with an opportunity for long term investment to deal with acute problems now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike McCormick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "McCormick" clearly legible.

Mike McCormick  
President

MM/lt/tm

c: The Honorable Delbert Hosemann  
The Honorable Briggs Hopson  
The Honorable John Read  
The Honorable Joel Carter  
The Honorable Scott Bounds