

At a hearing Wednesday to address the Federal Communications Commission's new national broadband plan, Rep. Peter Welch called for a renewed emphasis on providing universal access to rural communities.

The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet, of which Welch is a member, is holding a series of hearings to address the FCC's National Broadband Plan (NBP). Released in March, the NBP is intended to serve as a roadmap to affordable, high-speed broadband access for Americans.

At the hearing Welch pledged to be a voice for Vermonters and rural Americans as his committee considers the NBP.

"In this day and age, access to broadband is no longer a luxury, but a necessity," Welch said. "For Vermont and states like it to compete in the 21st Century, we must make greater strides toward achieving universal access. To fail in this effort would be to fail large swaths of rural America."

[Click here](#) to watch Welch speak in front of the subcommittee Wednesday. His remarks, as prepared for delivery, are copied below:

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for calling this hearing and for the leadership you have provided on advancing this vital issue of broadband access. I also want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be here today. I look forward to hearing from each of you about the Federal Communications Commission's assessment of deploying last-mile broadband.

Vermont is intimately familiar with the challenges of last-mile broadband deployment. Close to 20 percent of Vermonters currently lack access to high speed broadband, and the majority of the state lacks access to state-of-the-art communications tools such as WIFI hotspots in town centers and mobile television services.

In this day and age, access to broadband is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. For Vermont and states like it to compete in the 21st Century, we must make greater strides toward achieving universal access. To fail in this effort would be to fail large swaths of rural America.

As a country, we must address those communities with no access to broadband and towns that the private market has left behind. This is why I support the National Broadband Plan's proposed reform of the Universal Service Fund (USF) and expansion of the Community Connect program. We must reach the goal of deploying broadband facilities capable of actual download speeds of 4 Mbps and upload speeds of 1 Mbps to 99 percent of the unserved population by 2020.

I hope to learn more today about how Congress can utilize the USF and Community Connect programs to help move some of the most rural parts of my district into the 21st Century.

Again, I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for convening this Subcommittee hearing and look forward to working with the Subcommittee to address this issue in the future.