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Cell service threat

Last week, the Federal Communications Commission signaled its intent to cap the Federal Universal Service Fund “very soon” — most likely by Nov. 1.

This is especially dangerous for Nebraska as the USF provides critical support for wireless companies to build new cell towers in rural communities across Nebraska and the nation.

The USF has enabled wireless carriers such as U.S. Cellular to build hundreds of towers in rural communities nationwide and bring new service to areas that would not have otherwise had access.

Despite this, the FCC may enact this cap within the next few weeks — without fully considering the effect of this decision on rural Americans.

Without reliable wireless coverage, first responders such as police officers and firefighters cannot quickly and reliably deal with critical safety issues. A freeze in funding for wireless also will widen the technological gap between urban and rural areas in the state.

U.S. Cellular recently received ETC designation in Nebraska, allowing us to access approximately \$5.5 million in USF funding annually. However, if the proposed cap goes through, the \$5.5 million in new federal funds will be put on hold indefinitely, compromising the planned investment of 66 planned sites over the next five years.

U.S. Cellular is calling on Congress and the FCC to protect universal service funding for wireless carriers that serve rural America. For more information, please visit www.connectingruralamerica.org.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: The author is president of U.S. Cellular. Rooney will be in Ansley on Monday, for the construction of a new U.S. Cellular cell phone tower.