

This Delay Is a Threat to Rural America

A Letter from Caleb Etheridge Co-Owner & CEO of EPC

In a letter to Secretary Lutnick, EPC Co-Owner & CEO Caleb Etheridge expresses concern over federal delays impacting Louisiana's BEAD broadband rollout, which would deliver fiber to 96% of eligible locations ahead of schedule and under budget. Etheridge highlights the risk these delays pose to private investment, workforce stability, and future infrastructure builds. He urges prompt action to preserve the momentum and capacity Louisiana has built, cautioning that continued inaction could undermine the state's achievements.

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By: Caleb Etheridge Co-Owner & CEO of EPC



Dear Secretary Lutnick,

As someone who built a company from a second-hand directional drill and excavator to a regional firm feeding hundreds of families, I don't ask for help easily. Lord willing, I envision, believe in and execute to achieve a future, and I've done exactly that, not because the odds were ever in our favor, but because it was possible, and we put in the work. That mindset has served me well, creating hundreds of jobs and helping rewrite the narrative about what's possible in rural Louisiana.

But I'm writing to you now because what's happening in Washington is actively threatening everything we've built. To say it very plainly and remove any inferences, you're not keeping your word.

Louisiana did its part. We ran a competitive BEAD program that should be the national model. We delivered the Cadillac of broadband, fiber to the home, to approximately 96% of eligible locations. We did it with speed and 40% under what was allocated for the build. Our office moved faster than any other in the country. That efficiency triggered massive private investment. Companies like mine scaled up, hired people, and bought equipment based on a signed NTIA Final Approval. I know words get twisted often up there in the halls of the nation's capitol, but down here final means done, period.

Now you're telling us you have changed your mind. That we now need to wait while smarter (political) minds decide what's best for us from DC?

And here's the irony: you're holding things up in the name of government efficiency, yet you're delaying the most traceable tax dollar in the entire federal system, one that ties directly to a physical address, a home, a family. This is infrastructure you can see, measure, and audit in real time, and we did it 40% under budget. You say it's in the name of ensuring we get an even BETTER deal in LEO's. Go tell that to my barber, whose state-of-the-art satellite connection drops and buffers all through the day. And, he was the lucky one that had "a clear view of the sky" from his rooftop.

Meanwhile, every day of delay thins out our workforce. If other states catch up while Louisiana is stuck in limbo, our trained talent will be picked off. Labor costs will spike. Our builds, quoted and contracted based on the anticipated market, will become financially unworkable. You will have taken the one state that followed the rules, built the playbook, and finally was first in something you'd want to be, and you will have punished us for it.

Let me be clear: I'm not writing to complain. I'm writing to warn. I, along with my amazing leadership, have already begun to assess and pivot. But the damage from this delay will not be reversible. You have a window to act before we lose the capacity we've built.

Its too late to play political games. And if this continues, I will shine an even brighter light on the harm you have caused, along with my federal delegation who nodded in agreement in private rooms but stood silently when it was time to be courageous.

This moment doesn't need a task force or a think tank. It needs a decision.

Sincerely,
Caleb Etheridge
Founder & CEO, EPC