UTC 2021 Resolution: Resolution on Federal Support for State Block Grant Funding for Broadband Infrastructure Development (Chelan PUD)

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic made us reconsider how we work, attend school, seek medical care and interact with family and friends;

WHEREAS, Access to high speed broadband can make the difference between remote work and unemployment; continuing school or falling behind; and accessing medical care using home telehealth services instead of traveling hours to the nearest hospital;

WHEREAS, Open access network utility providers have proven they are willing to build high quality infrastructure to underserved and unserved areas;

WHEREAS, Existing federal funding programs aren't designed to include open-access systems due to eligible telecommunications carrier requirements;

WHEREAS, Reverse auctions will generate a least-cost solution, but not necessarily the best long-term solution, which could be more cost-effective over the life of the equipment;

WHEREAS, USDA broadband loans are not possible for some public entities because they are not legally allowed to pledge their assets pursuant to the collateral requirements;

WHEREAS, Many states have broadband offices with a deep understanding of the needs of individual communications and an awareness of the infrastructure development programs of public and private providers, including utility providers with open access networks;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the federal government remove the barrier of eligible telecommunication carriers and other such requirements that otherwise prevent open access utilities from receiving federal funding for broadband infrastructure;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the UTC supports a role for states in identifying funding needs and mechanisms that work best for rural communities and rural providers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the federal government should create state block grant programs that allow broadband infrastructure funding requirements to be tailored by states to best address the infrastructure development needs of customers in each community.