



Where Is the Speed for BEAD?

Louisiana was promised millions to start broadband construction by April 2025 that it has not received. This is killing my US-based company and requiring me to layoff 80% of my contracted workers. We can't wait another 90 days.

This letter from a BEAD contractor of \$270M in broadband deployment projects demonstrates how politics is blowing up any “benefit of the bargain.”

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Dear Secretary Lutnick,

My name is Josh Etheridge. My brother Caleb and I own EPC, a broadband construction company based in Louisiana. Eight years ago, we started this company with a used drill and the two work trucks we earned over years of working pipeline on the road and traded our personal vehicles in for. It was just the two of us, working on the side of the road—fueled by grit, a desire to finally be at home every night, and to create something to support other families in our area.

Since then, EPC has doubled year over year—in both revenue and team size. Today, we employ over 160 full-time team members and support another 150+ through our subcontractor network.

Caleb and I are from Caldwell Parish, Louisiana—a rural area with one major road and four stoplights. I lived there most of my life. When my wife was in nurse practitioner school remotely, we didn't have access to high-speed fiber. We relied on HughesNet, but she kept exceeding bandwidth and data caps just trying to stream her classes. She had to borrow my dad's Verizon hotspot—something we honestly couldn't afford at the time. We thought this was just an inconvenience.... But then COVID hit. Caldwell Parish was hurting. Our people couldn't learn remotely. They couldn't work from home. They were being left behind. That's when we knew we had to act. We helped form the broadband board in our parish and built out the very first GUMBO (CPF) award project there.

But, this story isn't unique. There are many others. My wife works in a rural clinic in another small town, where she's seen patients ride in barefoot on lawn mowers—desperate to be seen, with no other transportation. We know how critical broadband is to telehealth. And more than that—we know the people it affects. We're not just observers. We're doers. We've lived it. We've seen the impact. So, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work again. We recognized the potential and importance of the national effort to bring broadband to rural communities, and we bought in wholeheartedly.

We attended every damage prevention summit. We pushed for workforce development. We helped launch a public-private partnership with LCTCS to create training programs for horizontal drilling. We partnered with more than half of the BEAD winners in our region. We built the relationships. We hired the people.

We made ourselves a true turnkey solution. We signed leases, bought equipment, rented warehouses. We invested in software, training, and local partnerships.

And now—we're stuck. Not because we didn't do the work. Not because we weren't ready. But because of bureaucracy and politics.

EPC has done everything right. Our team enjoys some of the best benefits in North Louisiana: top-tier health insurance, paid time off, sick leave, family days, Christmas parties, and a culture rooted in growth and respect. We're active members of over 10 chambers of commerce, investing more than \$200,000 a year into local sponsorships. We're the largest donor in Louisiana to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We give our time to nonprofits. We've even been honored for our contributions.

Companies like EPC are the backbone of the American economy. We are the model of a community-minded business.

And yet—here we are. Stalled by a system that seems more focused on politics than progress.

We're conservatives. We believe in fiscal responsibility and cleaning up D.C. We support efforts to protect taxpayer dollars. But we're also just hardworking people in Louisiana, ready to do the job we were told to prepare for. We followed the rules. We ran a clean process. No DEI mandates. Forty percent under budget. Tech-neutral. No labor strings. We signed our agreements and were ready to put boots on the ground by January 25th.

But now? The market is frozen. I've had to release 80% of our subcontractors. We've paused philanthropic giving, scaled back our chamber memberships, and sadly begun to make lay-offs of our full-time employees. Even our at-risk capital builds are pulling back. We were poised for 300% growth. We prepared accordingly. And now—we wait.

Please don't let bureaucracy unravel everything we've built. Don't let it erase years of sacrifice—missed birthdays, missed ballgames, and countless hours building a company that uplifts entire communities. We're not a line item on a spreadsheet. We are real people. Real families. Real lives.

Louisiana did it right. You know it. Everyone knows it...

If this continues, you will have effectively weaponized a great ambition—meant to lift up and transform rural America—against the very people who believe in this administration. We supported our newly elected leaders— with our money, our words, and our votes — believing you would support us in return.

And now? We hear nothing.

**If that silence continues, it will say what no words ever could:
That we were never truly understood, that our sacrifice was never truly valued, & that our votes
and voices mattered only when it was time to count them — not when it came time to honor them.**

But it's not too late.

Let Louisiana move forward. Let EPC build. Let our people work.

Don't let another generation lose faith in the promises we were raised to believe in.
We are still ready. We are still willing.

Don't let silence be the final answer... You have the power to positively impact the lives of the 300 working families of EPC and over 100,000 Louisianians with your decision ...

Let Louisiana move forward.

Sincerely,
Josh Etheridge
Co-Owner, EPC

