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Rural Groups Laud Reps. Graves, B. Markey Letter Citing Concerns with National Broadband Plan

40 House Members Urge Modifications to Prevent Urban/Rural Digital Divide

Arlington, Va., (May 28, 2010) – The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA), the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) and the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) today hailed Reps. Sam Graves (R-Mo.), Betsy Markey (D-Co.) and 38 other members of the House for voicing their concerns about the potential negative impact of the FCC’s National Broadband Plan (NBP) on rural America.

In a letter to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, the representatives say the NBP, if implemented as proposed, sets the country on a course toward a greater urban/rural digital divide by proposing a broadband speed goal of just 4 megabits per second (Mbps) for rural regions while boasting of the benefits of 100 Mbps for urban areas. They note that 4 Mbps is inadequate broadband capacity for today’s consumer and business needs—let alone future commerce, health care, education, energy and public safety needs.

The letter points to the relatively predictable regulatory structure and support provided by the Universal Service Fund as the reason for successful voice and broadband deployment in rural areas. It notes that as proposed, the NBP abandons this successful policy approach, endangering the national statutory goal of affordable and comparable communications service for all consumers—including those in rural and insular areas.

“Our grave concern is that implementing the NBP as recommended will not provide all Americans with adequate broadband service because it puts at risk the regulatory structure and support that rural communications providers need to maintain and expand their networks,” the representatives said in the letter. “We request that you seriously consider these concerns and that you take the appropriate steps to modify the plan’s recommendations to ensure all Americans play a role in, and benefit from, the global communications leadership Congress envisioned this plan evoking.”

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The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association is the premier association representing more than 560 locally owned and controlled telecommunications cooperatives and commercial companies throughout rural and small-town America. NTCA provides its members with legislative,

regulatory and industry representation; meetings; publications and educational programs; and an array of employee benefit programs. Visit us at www.ntca.org.

The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 480 small, independently owned, local telecommunications companies serving primarily rural areas of the United States and Canada. OPASTCO membership includes both commercial companies and cooperatives, which range in size from fewer than 100 to 100,000 access lines, and collectively serve more than 5 million customers. OPASTCO represents rural telecommunications interests before federal regulatory bodies and Congress, provides publications, and holds two conventions annually in January and July of each year, addressing the needs of the small telecommunications industry. The association has an affiliate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). Visit the OPASTCO Website at www.opastco.org

Western Telecommunications Alliance is a trade association whose membership is comprised of approximately 250 rural telecommunications carriers providing high-quality voice, video and data services throughout rural areas in the 24 states west of the Mississippi River. On average, WTA member companies serve fewer than 3,000 access lines with fewer than 500 customers in each exchange. WTA's members serve some of the most rural and hard-to-serve communities in the country and are on the forefront of bringing 21st Century telecommunications services to rural America.