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Contact: Eric Keber, (202) 548-0202
www.w-t-a.org

WTA Responses to Congressional Passage of the Farm Bill

Washington, D.C. (May 15, 2008) – The Western Telecommunications Alliance today expressed support for Congress’ bipartisan approval of the conference report of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill). The Senate passed the Farm Bill today. House passage took place on May 14. The legislation includes language reauthorizing the Rural Utilities Service’s (RUS) Broadband Loan Program, a loan program that assists small telecommunications companies in bringing broadband to Americans in rural areas of the country.

“Many WTA member companies make use of low-interest RUS loans to invest in 21st Century communications networks for rural America,” said Kelly Worthington, WTA’s Executive Vice-President. “This legislation has been a long-time coming and should it become law, WTA is hopeful that RUS will implement it in such a way so that rural telcos will have timely access to broadband financing.”

The RUS Broadband Loan Program is one of several important tools small, rural telecommunications companies use to ensure rural Americans possess the same communications technology as the cities and suburbs.

“Broadband deployment is integral to the quality of life,” added Worthington. “From communications, to telemedicine, to enhancing business opportunities, it has the potential to keep rural America connected to the world around it.”

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Western Telecommunications Alliance represents over 250 rural telecommunications companies in 24 states west of the Mississippi River. Most members serve fewer than 3,000 customers overall and fewer than 500 customers per exchange. WTA aims to unite a diverse industry to deliver influence in the western states and in Washington, D.C. that reflects its members’ importance in providing high quality telecommunications services to rural America. For more information about WTA, contact Kelly Worthington, Executive Vice President at (406) 443-6377; Kelly@w-t-a.org; or visit www.w-t-a.org.