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Rural Groups Hail Senate Letter on National Broadband Plan *22 Senators Urge Serious Consideration of Plan's Impact on Rural America*

Helena, MT (July 11, 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) praised Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and a bipartisan group of 21 other senators for expressing concern over the impact of the FCC's National Broadband Plan (NBP) on rural consumers' ability to receive comparable and affordable broadband.

In a letter to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, the senators urged serious consideration of the NBP's impact on rural America and noted that Congress directed the FCC in the Recovery Act to conduct an analysis of the most effective and efficient mechanisms for ensuring broadband access for all people of the United States.

"Our concern is that some of the proposals in the NBP have the potential to set the United States on a course toward a greater digital divide between urban and rural areas," the Senators said in the letter. They cited the plan's proposed goal of bringing broadband speeds of 100 Mbps to 100 million homes, while at the same time transitioning universal service support to broadband service of just 4 Mbps.

"Establishing such a low threshold for rural residents and businesses relegates them to second class broadband capacity," the letter said. "It hinders their ability to share in the transformative vision for broadband outlined in the NBP."

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Western Telecommunications Alliance represents over 250 rural telecommunications companies providing quality voice, data and video services in 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. For more information about WTA visit www.w-t-a.org.