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FCC PROPOSALS RISK BACKSLIDING ON RURAL BROADBAND

OPASTCO and WTA Urge the FCC to Choose Long-Term Solutions to Ensure Ubiquitous Broadband Availability

WASHINGTON – The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) and the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) today urged the FCC, as it prepares its National Broadband Plan for Congress, to refrain from adopting short-term, stop-gap measures that are inconsistent with the long-term goal of ubiquitous broadband availability.

Specifically, the associations urge the FCC to focus on ensuring that high-cost support mechanisms are commensurate with the public need for expanded broadband availability and speed, and reforming the Universal Service Fund (USF) contribution mechanism to adequately support current rural networks and enable the necessary new investment to expand and upgrade rural broadband infrastructure.

“Universal service reform must be made with long-term broadband availability in mind,” OPASTCO President John Rose stated. “Any plan recommendations that focus on voice service, a reduction in support for rural broadband, or puts the long-term sustainability of the USF at risk are unacceptable solutions that disregard the broadband needs of rural America.”

“USF contributed to building a communications network that has helped make our country a global leader, and Carriers of Last Resort (COLRs) are an important part of that successful, ubiquitous communications network. We urge the FCC to look beyond the stop-gap answers to ensure that rural customers and carriers will not be on the losing end of these decisions,” WTA Executive Vice President Kelly Worthington stated. “Rural COLRs remain a necessary part of our communications network and are crucial to the development of a robust broadband network that meets the broadband needs of Americans everywhere.”

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About OPASTCO:

The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) represents more than 525 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 5.5 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 Web site at www.opastco.org.

About WTA:

WTA is a trade association that represents more than 250 rural telecommunications carriers that operate as Carriers of Last Resort within the 24 states west of the Mississippi River. Most members serve fewer than 3,000 access lines overall, and fewer than 500 access lines per exchange. For more information visit www.w-t-a.org.