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WTA Welcomes Legislation Introduced by Senator Orrin Hatch to Address Federal Permitting Delays

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 13, 2017) – WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband welcomes Senator Orrin Hatch’s (R-UT) Highway Rights-of-Way Permitting Efficiency Act of 2017, which was introduced last Friday afternoon. The bill would grant a categorical exclusion from federal environmental assessments and impact statements to any broadband project within an operational right-of-way. In addition, it would allow state governments to enter into Memoranda of Understanding with federal agencies to share all or a portion of the responsibilities of reviewing broadband projects within a federal right-of-way.

“WTA members, small rural telecom providers, face costly and time-consuming barriers to making use of existing rights-of-way on federal lands to build broadband networks. Government should do its due diligence, but it should also work efficiently because every day spent waiting for a permit is one more day rural Americans wait for quality broadband. Every dollar spent on duplicative environmental reviews is one less dollar available for investment in a robust broadband network,” said Derrick Owens, WTA’s Vice President of Government Affairs. “We look forward to working with the Senator to advance the shared goal of broadband buildout in rural America.”

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WTA represents more than 325 small, rural telecommunications carriers providing voice, broadband and video-related services in the United States. 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. To learn more about WTA, visit www.w-t-a.org.