



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 12, 2009

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**OPASTCO CHAIRMAN/WTA BOARD MEMBER GAILEY TESTIFIES
BEFORE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON BROADBAND AND USF REFORMS**

USF High-Cost Program Should Explicitly Support Broadband

WASHINGTON – Mark Gailey, chairman of the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) and board member of the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) today testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet on the Universal Service Fund (USF) and needed reforms to ensure a robust broadband network infrastructure throughout rural America.

Gailey’s testimony urged Congress to reform the USF to include:

- broadband as an explicitly supported service;
- expansion of the USF contributions base to include all broadband and voice connections;
- elimination of the identical support rule;
- removal of the existing cap on the USF High-Cost program; and
- permanent exemption of the USF from the Anti-Deficiency Act (ADA).

“I’m pleased that Chairman Boucher is continuing to show genuine interest in reforming the Universal Service Fund, which is something WTA and the rural telco industry has long advocated,” said Kelly Worthington, Executive Vice-President of WTA. “We’re moving to a broadband world and USF must move with the country. Reform should take the form of the proposals laid out in Mark’s testimony. Reverse auctions and other proposals that would curtail broadband deployment in rural America should be opposed.”

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“The High-Cost USF program is crucial to a strong rural broadband network, and rural carriers participating in the program recognize both their responsibilities to customers and government’s need to ensure that the funds are invested as intended,” OPASTCO President John Rose stated. “We need to all work together to make public accountability of the High-Cost USF program meaningful and efficient.”

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Note to Editors:

The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO represents more than 530 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 quality voice, video and data services in rural areas throughout the 24 states west of the Mississippi River. On average, WTA member companies serve fewer than 3,000 access lines overall with fewer than 500 customers per exchange. WTA’s members are on the forefront of bringing 21st Century telecommunications services to rural America and serve some of the most rural and hard-to-serve communities in the country. For more information, please visit WTA’s website at www.w-t-a.org.