



For Immediate Release

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Rural Telecom Associations Encouraged as FCC Further Inquiry References Proposed Consensus Reform Framework

August 4, 2011 (Washington, DC) – The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA), the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) and the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) (collectively, the Rural Associations) today released a statement regarding the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) further inquiry into Universal Service Fund (USF) and broadband deployment:

We are encouraged that the FCC is seeking further comment on complex issues implicated by USF reform and broadband deployment initiatives. The Rural Associations note specific reference by the FCC to the proposed consensus reform framework filed last week by rural, mid-size, and large carriers. That consensus framework reflects many difficult and carefully constructed compromises among providers who are committed to deploying advanced broadband services throughout the nation. The consensus framework is a balanced approach to reform that will fulfill the Commission's reform objectives and serve the public interest by enabling sustainable, high-quality, affordable broadband throughout rural America.

"The consensus framework filed by the Rural Associations and other telecom parties reflects a carefully constructed and negotiated balance of interests that will enable the parties to collectively meet FCC goals while providing broadband to more Americans," said NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield. "The complementary proposals filed by rural and other carriers meet the different needs of different providers, while fulfilling the common goal of greater broadband deployment."

"The consensus framework for universal service and intercarrier compensation reform is the product of many months of negotiation and compromise. It is a blueprint for reforms that will best serve broadband customers throughout our country," OPASTCO President John Rose stated. "We are ready and willing to work with the Commission to help them understand how the proposal we filed in April fits with the ABC proposal and together creates a workable solution that boosts our nation's place in the global economy."

"We worked long and hard to strike this delicate balance with our industry partners," said Kelly Worthington, WTA's Executive Vice President. "Each party had to give a little and I'm hopeful the FCC will recognize this as we work with them to move reform forward."

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The **National Telecommunications Cooperative Association** is the premier association representing more than 570 locally owned and controlled telecommunications cooperatives and commercial companies throughout rural and small-town America. NTCA provides its members with legislative, regulatory and industry representation; meetings; publications; and educational programs; and an array of employee benefit programs. Visit us at www.ntca.org.

The **Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies** (OPASTCO) is the leading voice for rural telecommunications, representing approximately 460 small incumbent local exchange carriers serving rural areas of the United States. Its members include both commercial companies and cooperatives, which collectively serve more than 3 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 us at www.opastco.org.

Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) is a trade association whose membership is comprised of approximately 250 rural telecommunications carriers providing high-quality, voice, video and data services throughout 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.