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RCA Briefs Rural Caucus on Challenges Facing Rural Mobile Broadband

Washington, DC – Today, RCA CEO Steven K. Berry briefed the Congressional Rural Caucus on issues and challenges facing rural mobile broadband providers. Two RCA member companies, Cellcom and Lemko, also presented materials, as well as CTIA. The session was well-attended, having over 40 Congressional staff participants.

Berry began by quoting FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, “that broadband is the future of mobile and mobile is the future of broadband.” He continued “I completely agree with the Chairman,” and stated that wireless broadband can be more economical than fiber, and is better able to reach rural areas. Berry further stressed the importance of increasing broadband deployment in rural areas in order to ensure that consumers have access to mobile broadband. Berry said, “Data roaming is a fundamental building block to ensure broadband capabilities in small and rural markets,” and he urged Congress and the FCC to support policies that guarantee consumers have access to robust data services or access to smartphones and the latest high-tech devices. Many of these devices are currently under handset exclusivity agreements with the nation’s largest carriers, particularly as these devices drive further usage of mobile broadband. He also said that purchasers of 700MHz spectrum must be able to fully develop their licenses and have access to the equipment to bring mobile broadband to rural America.

Berry demonstrated that reforming the Universal Fund by allowing support to be success based, or portable with consumers, would have more than offset all support to competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (CETCs) from 2002 to 2007 if incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC) support had declined at the same rate as nationwide ILEC switched access lines over the same time. Anticipating that consumers will continue to move from wireline to mobile services offerings, Berry stated that, “Consumers should determine which services they wish to use, and the support must follow the consumers. More and more frequently, these consumers are choosing mobile, and USF support should follow these consumers’ choices rather than increasingly subsidizing antiquated technology.” Providing wireless broadband to high-cost, remote areas could also solve many “middle mile” problems, as a mixture of microwave and fiber points proves to be more economical than wireline.

Closing his remarks, Berry stated that, “any policy that limits USF support to one ETC provider per study is anti-competitive and does little to enhance broadband policy.”

About RCA

RCA is the nation's leading association for wireless providers serving rural areas of the United States. The licensed service area of RCA's nearly 100 members covers more than 80 percent of the nation.

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RCA's briefing materials for the Rural Caucus can be found in the Members Only page of RCA's website.