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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce

Oversight of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: Broadband, Part 3 Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet March 4, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Boucher, for holding this hearing to continue our Committee's oversight of broadband programs created by the Recovery Act.

The broadband funding in the Recovery Act is dedicated to building essential digital infrastructure for the 21st century throughout the United States, and it is creating jobs for today and tomorrow.

This is the Subcommittee's third oversight hearing to review this important Recovery Act program, and it will likely not be the last. Although I am confident that the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) have been managing this program diligently, the Committee will continue to fulfill its oversight role going forward.

I know that the Obama Administration is also committed to conducting rigorous oversight of Recovery Act programs, including broadband funding. In addition to unprecedented transparency, the President's 2011 budget proposes to reallocate funds to allow specifically for continued NTIA oversight, monitoring, grant evaluation, and reporting essential to meet the highest standards for transparency and accountability in this program.

At our first oversight hearing on this matter, I stated NTIA and RUS had the difficult task of spending the taxpayer's money quickly, yet wisely. They would have to act in a decisive manner, but do so in ways that were fair, open, and transparent to the taxpayers.

As the first funding cycle for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) comes to a conclusion, I believe the agencies have met this difficult challenge.

To date, the two agencies have awarded over 60 projects totaling over \$1.25 billion in

grants and loans. The NTIA has also awarded nearly \$100 million in broadband mapping grants to almost every state and several territories. The projects are touching every corner of the country and range from the creation of a fiber-optic network throughout Maine; to broadband connectivity in 65 communities in southwestern Alaska; to digital literacy training throughout Southern California.

BTOP and BIP projects will not only extend and enhance broadband offerings in the United States; they will also serve the Recovery Act's central objective of creating and preserving jobs.

I want to commend Assistant Secretary Strickling and Administrator Adelstein for their efforts – not to mention the staff at NTIA and RUS – in rising to this challenge.

NTIA and RUS also merit praise for being open to suggestions for improvements.

I am encouraged by the changes made in the second Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) issued late last year. They reduced administrative burdens on applicants, streamlined the application process, and now allow satellite providers to play a role in providing broadband service to rural areas. I am particularly pleased with NTIA's emphasis on so-called "middle-mile projects" and a commitment to provide the best services at the best value to the American taxpayer.

I look forward to hearing your testimony today and appreciate your participation.