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

National Broadband Plan: Deploying Quality Broadband Services to the Last Mile

Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet

April 21, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on deploying broadband service to unserved and underserved communities across the nation. Because broadband is critical to future economic growth and job creation, every American must have the opportunity to access high-quality, high-speed broadband from a variety of providers.

The Plan provides a blueprint on how public sector policies can promote deployment to both unserved and underserved communities. It also speaks to ways in which the private sector can act. By utilizing all the tools the public and private sectors have at their collective disposal, we can achieve a primary goal of the National Broadband Plan – 99 percent access to high-speed broadband within ten years.

While there are a number of proposals in the Plan, and I commend the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) staff for their thoroughness, I would like to take a moment to highlight a couple that I find to be promising. For example, the Plan recognizes that substantial cost savings can occur from better planning and coordination among government resources and recommends that all federally-funded rights-of-way projects include a broadband conduit at the time of construction. This proposal is similar to legislation introduced by Congresswoman Eshoo of which I am a cosponsor. Greater access to rights-of-ways at reduced costs can help spur the deployment of advanced facilities not only in urban areas, but also deeper into rural areas.

The Plan also highlights specific ways in which the federal universal service system can be reformed, and I am very encouraged by these proposals. The obvious goal is to transform the fund to support broadband networks so that all Americans have access, and I am encouraged that the FCC is initiating the first of these proceedings at its Open Meeting that is occurring this morning. I am also encouraged that Chairman Boucher is working on draft legislation to help achieve this goal, and I am supportive of his efforts.

The plan also recommends addressing the data roaming issue. Consumers will be well-served by common-sense reform in this area.

Finally, I would like to commend the FCC for putting forward a proposed timeline of its implementation schedule for the many proposals in the plan. This is the first time the FCC has so clearly outlined its work schedule, and I think that this approach is consistent with the Chairman's view that the FCC should be as open and transparent as possible.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.