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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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May 22, 2007

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

In the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to encourage the deployment of advanced telecommunications capability. Commonly referred to as "broadband," these systems provide for high-capacity, high-speed transmission of data, video, and voice. Increasingly, broadband is viewed as a critical component of the United States' physical infrastructure and a key driver of economic growth. In addition to spurring economic growth, broadband can also provide other indirect benefits. For example, by enhancing the ability of workers to telecommute, broadband can indirectly help the United States deal with the ever growing problems of traffic congestion and pollution. Telecommuting may also be a way to afford workers enhanced flexibility to attend to important family obligations.

Various federal agencies and commissions have efforts underway to spur the deployment of broadband service. Through the Rural Utilities Service, the Department of Agriculture provides grants and loans to companies deploying broadband service in rural areas of the United States. The FCC has initiated numerous proceedings in recent years addressing broadband deployment, including a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released on April 16, 2007, seeking information on data collection efforts. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration has promoted policies to enable new competitors to enter the market and offer advanced broadband services. Further, consistent with a presidential memorandum and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the General Services Administration issued guidance to federal agencies on their responsibilities to permit wireless telecommunications providers to install antennas on federal buildings and lands.

A key goal of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is to require the efficient use of government resources to avoid waste and reduce expenses. This means that federal agencies and commissions should take full advantage of the existing tools at their

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disposal, while avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts. To this end, we request that the Government Accountability Office conduct a survey of all actions undertaken by the Federal Government to encourage broadband deployment. In particular, the study should address:

- What actions have been taken by the federal government to encourage the deployment of broadband service? Included in this survey of actions should be a listing of existing or pending regulatory proceedings, programs, or policy initiatives at any federal agency or commission.
- What are the broadband deployment and individual access rates in the United States and how do these rates compare to those in other countries? Included in this survey should be subscriber and non-subscriber access rates, as well as a general overview of various platforms and access points.
- To what extent are federal agencies and commissions utilizing tools provided by existing authority to encourage the deployment of broadband service?
- What are the unique characteristics of the United States that affect broadband deployment and access?
- What steps are federal agencies and commissions taking to coordinate with one another to avoid duplication of efforts, streamline regulations, or leverage efforts to further broadband deployment and access?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please have your staff contact Roger Sherman of the Majority staff at (202) 225-5051, Pat Delgado of Rep. Waxman's staff at (202) 225-3976, and Chas Phillips of the Minority staff at (202) 225-5074 to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Chairman



Tom Davis
Ranking Member