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Rebuild Rural Coalition Members Testify at House Hearing *Leaders advocate for rural infrastructure*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Witnesses representing the Rebuild Rural Coalition (RRC) testified today before the House Agriculture Committee at the hearing on rural infrastructure. They underscored the different needs of rural versus urban areas. Additionally, they discussed the competitiveness of American agriculture and viability of rural communities relying on improved roads and bridges, clean water, reliable electricity and broadband internet access.

“Rural America helped pull the country out of the Great Recession thanks to the strength of agriculture exports and rural energy production,” said Tom Halverson, CEO of CoBank. “In recent years, however, the rural economy has suffered due to low commodity prices and other difficulties. All of us should be looking for ways to support the health and vitality of the rural economy during this period of challenge, and infrastructure investment is one of the best strategies to do that.”

“Over the last decade, I have witnessed an alarming decline in historical competitive advantage that our transportation infrastructure has provided U.S. agriculture, and the corresponding increase in investment in critical infrastructure being made by our foreign competitors,” said Rick Calhoun, immediate past chairman of the National Grain and Feed Association’s Waterborne Commerce Committee. “We welcome the critically needed renewed sense of urgency by this Congress and the Trump administration to enact an infrastructure package that includes a reliable funding mechanism to renovate our dilapidated inland waterways system, as well as to restore our rural roads and bridges. Both are essential to the future vibrancy of rural communities and competitiveness of U.S. agriculture.”

“A robust communications infrastructure is just as important to our business as our traditional assets like poles, wires and power plants,” said Curtis Wynn, President and CEO of Roanoke Electric Cooperative. “My co-op is investing \$4 million to lay a fiber communications “backbone” in our service territory. Once this foundation is in place, there are many things we can do with it. One option could be providing broadband internet to our consumers’ homes. Many people in our region don’t have access to reliable internet. That puts our consumers, schools, hospitals and employers at a disadvantage. Addressing the infrastructure challenges facing rural America requires many different types of technologies, partnerships and engagement from all stakeholders. A separate infrastructure package will give co-ops a great opportunity to make investments to ensure the success and stability of rural America.”

“Robust broadband infrastructure is critical to the current and future success of rural America,” said Jennifer Otwell, General Manager of Totelcom Communications, LLC. “But the very characteristics that enable the unique beauty and enterprise of rural America also make it very expensive to deploy and sustain advanced communications services there. Our industry is excited to participate in this conversation regarding infrastructure initiatives, and we look forward to working with policymakers and other stakeholders on a comprehensive infrastructure strategy to ensure that all Americans will experience the numerous benefits of broadband.”

The [#RebuildRural](#) Coalition is comprised of more than 200 organizations representing U.S. agricultural producers, rural businesses, rural communities and rural families. On February 22, 2017, the coalition [wrote](#) to President Donald J. Trump encouraging him to prioritize rebuilding infrastructure in rural America.

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