

TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
July 7, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Senator Chambliss, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you as President Obama's nominee for Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Administrator. I am deeply grateful to President Obama for nominating me, and Secretary Vilsack, an outstanding advocate for rural America, for his support of that nomination.

Mr. Chairman, it is largely due to your leadership, and that of many members of the Committee, that the RUS now has a unique opportunity to help restore our economic prosperity through the President's stimulus package.

To meet the high expectations you have rightfully placed with the agency, I will draw upon what I learned growing up as a fourth-generation South Dakotan. My great-grandmother homesteaded near the Badlands and thrived there, along with so many other pioneers who were scattered over large distances, by staying connected and pulling for each other.

Since those times, my family has a long history of improving the infrastructure of rural America. As the son of a homesteader, my grandfather served in World War I as an engineer building bridges for the Allies in Europe. Upon his return, he started a construction company in South Dakota. My father took over that business and made it thrive before moving on to his own career in public service, currently in the South Dakota Senate. My brother continues the family business today, and the motto of our family company remains with me even now: "Builders of Better Bridges and Highways." Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will carry that mission with me to the RUS.

However, in the 21st Century economy, the essential connections for our communities now include more than just roads: through technology and other

advancements, citizens across the country can connect in ways more profound than my great-grandmother could have ever imagined. Communities in rural America once faced economic extinction without access to the highway system. Today, they depend upon access to the main arteries of the communications system, the power of our electrical infrastructure and plentiful sources of clean water. RUS has a critical role to bring these significant opportunities to rural Americans. It should strive to ensure that all of the essential energy, telecommunications and water utilities it supports are as good as any in the Nation. We need the same spirit of those early pioneers to ensure that the infrastructure we build for the 21st Century provides economic opportunities and improved quality of life for all our rural residents.

As a Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission for over six years, I have traveled across the United States, and worked, on a bipartisan basis, to address the many challenges and seize the many opportunities facing rural America. It is clear that we must upgrade our infrastructure in every corner of this country, and make new technologies more widely available and affordable to everyone. All of our citizens should have access to the highest quality utilities, no matter where they live or what challenges they face.

I believe one of our key national priorities should be to aggressively promote the expansion of broadband deployment and adoption. Even though we've made significant strides, we are not keeping pace with our global competitors. We must restore our place as the undisputed world leader in communications technology. Some have argued that the reason we've fallen so far in the international rankings is that we are more rural than those ahead of us. If that is correct, we must cite it not as a despairing excuse but as a clarion call to re-double our efforts to promote rural broadband.

The role of the RUS is to ensure that rural pipes – electric, telecommunications and water – are affordable to all and second to none. This is not only critical to the future of rural America, but essential to our Nation's overall economic growth. I served for 15

years on the staff of the U.S. Senate, the final seven for Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, and saw firsthand the commitment Congress has made to improve the quality of life for rural Americans. If confirmed, I will use that experience to carry out the vital mission of the RUS in order to maximize its effectiveness as Congress envisioned.

In fact, one of my proudest achievements as a Senate staffer was advising Senator Daschle when he was a senior member of the 2002 Farm Bill conference committee on creating provisions to expand the scope of RUS to include the provision of loans and grants for broadband deployment. Working closely with your staff, Mr. Chairman, we helped move the RUS into the 21st Century, beyond merely voice service to the broadband world of voice, video and data. It would be a special honor, if confirmed, to implement that program in a way that ensures it can reach its highest potential.

Building better rural utilities is critical to the quality of life and future economic prosperity of rural America. We need to ensure that young people who want to remain in the small towns, farms and ranches where they grew up can find the economic opportunities to do so and raise their families. Modern telecommunications and electrical and water systems are essential to address their needs on many levels: in terms of health, public safety, education, employment and economic opportunities, and general quality of life. These systems are the backbone of our economic development efforts.

If confirmed, a special priority in that mission that I would be eager to address is America's need for energy independence, which will require greater promotion of renewable energy technologies. It is also of pressing importance to bring safer drinking water, sewer systems and drainage facilities to many of our rural communities, which are essential to the health of our citizens.

During my service on the FCC, I have emphasized the need for expanding diversity in all of our endeavors. If confirmed, I will continue that effort. I will not

tolerate any form of discrimination, and will work with Secretary Vilsack to resolve any existing civil rights claims in our program or employment practices.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed I will strive to continue my proud family tradition of building better bridges and highways in rural America. I will carry out the charge of Congress to ensure that the finest utilities serve as a basis for rural economic development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.