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FCC Launches Development of National Broadband Plan

Through a *Notice of Inquiry*, the FCC is seeking comments on broadband deployment and use, including current status, strategies for achieving affordability and maximum utilization of broadband infrastructure and services, and effective and efficient ways to ensure universal broadband access. The Commission is focused on enabling the build-out and utilization of high-speed broadband infrastructure, with the goal of eventually providing broadband access to every American and establishing clear benchmarks to meet this goal.

The Commission seeks comments on the elements that should go into a national broadband plan, including definitions of “high-speed,” “access,” and “broadband.” In addition to these key definitions, the Act requires the Commission to:

- Analyze the most effective and efficient mechanisms for ensuring universal broadband access.
- Include a detailed strategy for achieving affordability of such service and maximum utilization of broadband infrastructure and service by the public.
- Include an evaluation of the status of deployment of broadband service, including progress of projects supported by the grants.
- Include a plan for the use of broadband infrastructure and services in advancing a broad array of public interest goals, including consumer welfare, civic participation, public safety and homeland security, community development, health care delivery, energy independence and efficiency, education, worker training, private sector investment, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and economic growth.

On June 8, 2009, hundreds of individuals and entities, including the American Petroleum Institute’s Telecommunications Committee, filed comments in this proceeding. API’s comments emphasized that the oil and natural gas industry is in the midst of migrating to IP-enabled technology much in the same way that utilities are seeking new efficiencies through smart grid deployment. Unfortunately, the oil and natural gas industry has “hit the wall” when it comes to identifying broadband communications options, wireless or wireline, necessary to implement its plans.

These comments also recommend specific actions the Commission can take to improve the communications options available to the energy industry, including:

- Creating an exclusive, licensed, critical infrastructure industry broadband spectrum allocation.
- Adopting spectrum etiquette requirements for digitally modulated devices.
- Improving the Commission’s secondary markets and auctions procedures.

The Commission is required to release its national broadband plan by February 2010.

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