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Jonathan Adelstein, Former RUS Administrator And FCC Commissioner, Honored As “American Rural Champion”

Jonathan Adelstein, a former FCC Commissioner who recently served as the Administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utilities Service (RUS), was named the first-ever American Rural Champion (ARC) last week by the Rural Broadband Alliance (RBA), a coalition of nearly 200 rural telecommunications carriers. Adelstein recently left the RUS to take a job as President and CEO of the Personal Communications Industry Association (PCIA).

In making the award to Adelstein, RBA noted the many contributions that Adelstein has made to rural communities and rural economic development. In bestowing the honor to Adelstein at a dinner associated with the RBA’s annual meeting last week, Diane Smith, founder of America Rural and advisor to RBA, stated, “Jonathan Adelstein should be recognized and honored for all he did in his years of serving rural and small-town America.”

The group singled out Adelstein for his leadership dating back to the incorporation of rural concerns into the 1996 Telecommunications Act when he worked in senior staff roles in the U.S. Senate. As an FCC Commissioner, Adelstein was a constant champion of universal service, working to ensure that rural communities have access to advance communications.

More recently, Adelstein served as RUS Administrator where oversaw a \$60 million portfolio of rural electric, water, and telecommunications infrastructure loans. He spearheaded the strategic investment of \$3.5 billion into rural broadband infrastructure expansion to stimulate economic development and provide new or improved broadband service to millions of residents, businesses, and community facilities across rural America.

Adelstein has long been a strong advocate to improve rural telecommunications and broadband. Adelstein worked aggressively to warn the FCC that proposed USF rule changes could undermine the deployment of broadband services in rural communities across the country. He outlined his concerns at congressional hearings and set forth proposed alternatives to address the concerns he identified.

In honoring Adelstein, RBA noted that he was being recognized for a “life-time of service to rural America.” A native of Rapid City, South Dakota, his work at the FCC and the RUS was marked by a commitment to improve rural telecommunications and broadband and to protect the integrity of USF.

When Adelstein was appointed by President Barack Obama to lead the RUS in 2009, he won easy and unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate. During his tenure at the agency, he won praise for his efforts from lawmakers – of both political parties – and from industry groups and helped restore the agency’s credibility after bruising battles between RUS and Congress during the Bush administration.

Adelstein becomes the first annual recipient of the RBA’s ARC Award. In establishing the award, RBA stressed its own commitment to improving economic opportunities in rural America.

“Our focus goes beyond advocacy for rural providers,” RBA spokesman Steve Kraskin said. “We are concerned with rural communities and rural economic development and decided to establish annual recognition of individuals who make significant contributions to build the future for rural communities.

“Although he has left public service and no longer is in a position to advocate for rural interests within the Obama administration, it is important that Jonathan Adelstein’s passion and commitment to rural America be recognized. This is our way of saying thank you for all the years of service, but also to encourage others to show the same passion, commitment, and courage to protect the economic interests of rural Americans.”

RBA also noted ironically that the “American Rural Champion” acronym, “ARC,” is also used by the FCC in its new USF and intercarrier compensation rule changes. Those new rules establish an “Access Recovery Charge” which the FCC calls the “ARC.” The FCC’s ARC has the effect of increasing rates on consumers to offset the recovery of costs formerly recovered from interconnection charges assessed to carriers for the use of local networks to terminate. The FCC rules reduce and ultimately eliminate these charges and save large carriers like AT&T and Verizon more than a billion dollars a year while consumer rates increase from the assessment of the FCC’s ARC.

“We believe the American Rural Champion award is a better use of the “ARC” acronym than its use by the FCC which reflects increases on consumers and a billion dollar give away to large telecommunications carriers,” RBA spokesman Kraskin said.