

County Mayor of Coffee County

DAVID PENNINGTON



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April 9, 2009

Bernadette McGuire-Rivera
Associate Administrator, Office of Telecommunication and
Information Applications
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
U. S. Department of Commerce
Room 4812
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

RE: Docket Number 090309298-9299-01

Dear Ms. McGuire-Rivera:

Whether for business, emergency communication, or simply keeping in touch with family and friends, modern telecommunications technology is becoming more critical to American life every day. Therefore, we write today to encourage NTIA to allocate funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to support expansion of next-generation telecommunications services in unserved rural communities around the country.

Rural communities often have been left behind in the development and deployment of the latest telecommunications technology. Now is an exceptional opportunity to help rural cities and towns catch up to urban and suburban locales around the country by building broadband Internet networks in communities where they don't exist today and enhancing public safety communications networks.

Today's high-speed Internet is increasingly becoming essential for all facets of daily life. And while broadband is deployed to almost every household in urban and suburban areas, the market has failed to produce high-speed infrastructure in remote areas with fewer households. This means that America's heartland is less likely to enjoy the economic benefits that come from access to broadband: short term construction jobs, long term customer service and network maintenance jobs, access to healthcare, and distance learning opportunities for our children, to name but a few. By providing government funding for unserved areas, NTIA can ensure that rural communities are not denied these tools for economic recovery and expansion.

Unserved areas are also in dire need of enhanced public safety communications. In times of disaster and crisis, communication is often the difference between life and death. However, our current system is frighteningly susceptible to damage or failure during a major disaster – floods, hurricanes, and

ice storms are just a few recent examples. Therefore, promoting widespread adoption of mobile or satellite technology for emergency service teams around the country, but particularly in rural and remote communities, should be a public safety priority.

Recent history teaches us that proper oversight of any grants or loans is essential to prevent waste and fraud. NTIA should put in place a proper screening process to ensure that grant distribution focuses on areas that are truly "unserved." This requires a more adequate definition of "unserved" to prevent taxpayer-funded grants from enriching communities already served by private providers.

With the foregoing in mind, I request your support by way of stimulus package funding for utilization of Ben Lomand, a rural cooperation located in neighboring Warren County, for use in providing cable, phone and internet services in rural Warren, Coffee and adjacent counties.

We look forward to assisting NTIA throughout the grant process and thank you for reviewing our comments.

Sincerley,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Pennington", written in a cursive style.

David Pennington
Coffee County Mayor