



www.tiaonline.org | 10 G Street, NE, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20002

Tel: +1.202.346.3240
Fax: +1.202.346.3241

June 12, 2009

Mr. Tom Vilsack
Secretary of the (USDA)
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Expedition of BTOP Grant Awards.

Secretary Vilsack:

The Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) urges the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS), as it establishes a timeline for administering the Rural Development Broadband Program pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), to expedite the broadband grant and loan award process and provide the first round of such awards well prior to the end of the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2010 (FY 2010).

As you know, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 directed the RUS to administer \$2.5 billion in broadband funding under the Rural Development Broadband Program.¹ TIA appreciates the thoughtful and effective steps RUS has taken thus far to execute this duty. Additionally, the information contained in the RUS Broadband: ARRA Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan), which details its planned grant and loan administration schedule, is very informative.² The Recovery Plan's Schedule and Milestones anticipates that initial grants and loans will be awarded by the end of first quarter of FY 2010.³ While recognizing the importance of thoroughly vetting and reviewing applications and the significant amount of time it can take to do so, TIA respectfully requests that, to the extent feasible, the RUS take steps to at least partially begin to make these grants awards well in advance of the end of the first quarter of FY 2010. Such action would be in line with President Obama's recently announced plan to accelerate the spending of Recovery Act money over the next few months with the goal of creating an additional 600,000 jobs.

¹ See American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Division A, Title I.

² See United States Department of Agriculture Program Plan, Broadband: ARRA Recovery Plan, http://www.recovery.gov/?q=content/program-plan&program_id=7686 (last visited June 12, 2009).

³ See *id.*

TIA members are increasingly aware of public and private customers withholding on investments in ICT today. Many customers are awaiting grant and loan awards to make such investments, thereby stalling the economic engine the ICT industry can be in our nation's difficult economic times. With the initial disbursement of funding of the Rural Development Broadband Program currently planned for the as late as the end of FY 2010, ICT investment spending could be further stalled for at least 2 to 3 quarters. This will have a devastating impact on our economy – one that the RUS can prevent by making initial grant and loan awards prior to the first quarter of FY 2010.

TIA recognizes the importance of carefully evaluating Rural Development Broadband Program grant and loan applications to ensure all Americans benefit from the best projects. Simultaneously, TIA believes that awarding worthy Rural Development Broadband Program grants and loans as quickly as possible will speed economic recovery. Thus, TIA urges RUS to balance these two interests and adjust its Recovery Plan's Schedule and Milestones to ensure that initial grant awards are made well prior to the end of FY 2010.

TIA appreciates your consideration of this important matter, and looks forward to working with you and the RUS as it administers the Rural Development Broadband Program.

Sincerely,



Danielle Coffey
Vice President
Government Affairs

CC: David J. Villano