UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

MAY 19 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

Thank you for your co-signed letter regarding the broadband initiatives in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). As you know, Section 6001 of the Recovery Act requires the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), in consultation with the Federal Communications Commission, to establish the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). The statute sets forth several priorities, including accelerating broadband deployment in both unserved and underserved areas, and ensuring that strategic institutions that are likely to create jobs or provide significant public benefits have broadband connections.

I appreciate the view expressed by you and Senator Tester that NTIA should implement the BTOP in a manner that prioritizes deployment of broadband in unserved areas. On March 12, 2009, NTIA released a *Request for Information* (RFI) that seeks public comment on a wide range of issues that will inform NTIA's decisionmaking as it develops its BTOP grant program. Among other things, the RFI seeks input on appropriate definitions of "unserved" and "underserved" areas. Comments in response to the RFI were due to NTIA by April 13, 2009, and all public comments are publicly available at the BTOP website at www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants.

NTIA will make broadband grant funds available through a competitive process and expects to release its initial grant guidelines this summer, after which eligible entities will be able to apply for broadband stimulus funds. NTIA also will be hosting grant workshops to encourage and facilitate entities seeking to apply for grants. NTIA is moving expeditiously to implement this program to ensure that Recovery Funds are made available as quickly as possible.

In closing, I give you my personal assurance that your thoughtful views on this matter, which will be made part of the public record, are greatly appreciated and will receive serious consideration as NTIA implements this important program. If I may be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact me or James Wasilewski, NTIA's Director of Congressional Affairs, at (202) 482-1551.

Sincerely,

Anna M. Gomez
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Communications and Information

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

MAY 19 2009

The Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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Anna M. Gomez
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Communications and Information

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

MAR 30 2009

March 18, 2009

ACTION OFFICE JW
COPIES TO MS, A. Wilhelm, BMR, A. Simpson, B. Brown, S. Morris, L. Atlas
SUSPENSE DATE
REMARKS
CONTROL# 0258

The Honorable Meredith Attwell Baker
Acting Assistant Secretary
NTIA
US Department of Commerce
14th Street & Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230-0001

Dear Secretary Baker:

As you begin to implement the broadband initiatives provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), we urge you to make deploying broadband to currently unserved areas your top priority. Economic recovery will be difficult to achieve in rural communities without broadband access.

Access to high speed internet is critically important. Broadband access to the Internet has significant impacts on the economic development of rural America. It is a crucial driver of economic recovery, creating jobs and enhancing our global competitiveness. In an increasingly globalized world, broadband access is an integral step for our education system's competitive edge. By providing access to high-speed internet to places that only have dial-up connections, broadband can help revitalize rural areas hardest hit by the recession, and then help rural America keep up with the urban areas once the recession ends.

In order to deploy broadband swiftly, but dependably, please consider utilizing rural telecoms. They have the necessary expertise for dependably reaching unserved areas, but because of their locations, will be able to quickly initiate projects in their area. They understand where broadband is and is not in their respective locations. Furthermore, because of rural telecoms existing presence in communities, they can more easily tap into existing networks and avoid previous shortfalls unique to rural settings.

Broadband access will also be important for rural health care services. The large geographical distance between rural communities means that many Montanans must travel great distances to access health care services. Telecommunications usage has revolutionized health care services in rural areas of Montana by allowing residents to access specialized, quality care in their own communities. This not only saves Americans in rural places travel time and expense, but it provides consistent and continually improving care through their primary provider.

Without access to broadband, many rural communities will be unable to realize the benefits of economic recovery as intended in the ARRA. The Administration has set a firm date for breaking ground on broadband construction. Rural telecoms can ensure that 50% of the ARRA funds are committed to projects that can be initiated not later than 120 days after enactment (i.e., by August 17, 2009). We also request your agency clearly defines the process you plan on following to award funds to rural telecom companies, and to work to ensure the funding is deployed as expediently as possible.

We urge you to make deploying broadband to unserved areas your first priority in dispensing the considerable resources accorded to broadband by Congress in the ARRA.

Sincerely,

Senator Max Baucus

Senator Jon Tester

MSB/bw