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SECRETARY LOCKE ANNOUNCES RECOVERY ACT INVESTMENT IN NEW MEXICO AND TEXAS TO EXPAND BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS AND SPUR ECONOMIC GROWTH

WASHINGTON – U.S. Commerce Secretary Locke today, joined by Senator Jeff Bingaman, Senator Tom Udall and former New Mexico Governor Toney Anaya on a press conference call, announced a \$11.2 million Recovery Act investment to help bridge the technological divide, boost economic growth, create jobs, and improve education and healthcare in eastern New Mexico and west Texas. The grant will bring high-speed Internet access to more than 200 community anchor institutions – including schools, public safety organizations, healthcare facilities, and government agencies – and lay the groundwork for bringing affordable broadband service to thousands of homes and businesses in the region.

The investment will allow the ENMR Telephone Cooperative, Inc., which does business as ENMR-Plateau, to enhance broadband Internet capabilities in eastern New Mexico and west Texas by providing a more than 1,600-mile ring of fiber. Among other benefits, the project plans to expand distance learning opportunities for students at schools and libraries in rural areas and enable connectivity to a telehealth network being constructed across New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado.

“This critical investment will expand high-speed Internet service access to New Mexico schools and hospitals, and eventually homes and businesses, helping to make them full participants in today’s 21st century information economy,” Locke said. “Having access to the Internet’s economic, health and educational benefits will help to improve the quality of life in these communities.”

The Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), funded by the Recovery Act, provides grants to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure, enhance and expand public computer centers, and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service.

“This \$11.2 million grant to ENMR Telephone Cooperative will make it possible to build miles of new fiber-optic lines, which will benefit businesses, schools, libraries, public safety entities,

and help advance the telehealth network being developed across New Mexico,” said Bingaman. “This grant is good news for eastern New Mexico, as well as for our entire state.”

“Over the last 10 years, America has gone from being a world leader in Internet penetration to now lagging in that effort, and as a state, New Mexico sadly falls towards the bottom of that list,” said Udall, a member of the Senate Commerce Committee. “I am proud this Recovery award will help develop the needed broadband infrastructure in New Mexico that will help enable telehealth services, distance learning programs and attract future businesses and jobs to our state.”

"This is great news for eastern New Mexico," said Anaya, executive director of the New Mexico Office of Recovery and Reinvestment. "The Recovery Act continues to invest in New Mexico's communities, employing thousands, rebuilding our infrastructure, and supporting the state budget."

New Mexico Representatives Martin Heinrich, Ben Ray Luján and Harry Teague also praised today's award.

“The world of information technology is vast, and vital to education and job opportunities in New Mexico,” said Heinrich. “By connecting New Mexicans with improved access to the Internet, we open the door to endless possibilities for learning and inspiring entrepreneurship and economic growth, which are key components of the Recovery Act.”

"As we become increasingly dependent on Internet technology for our everyday activities, we must ensure that all communities have access. Extending broadband throughout New Mexico will help our businesses grow, our children learn, and our communities stay informed," said Luján. "It is encouraging that the Recovery Act is making this important investment in broadband technology."

“For many communities in my district, access to broadband is a luxury – and often times that means they have to miss out on critical educational and economic opportunities,” said Teague. “These Recovery funds will help give rural communities in New Mexico the same opportunities that their more urban counterparts currently enjoy by providing the resources needed to build local economies and job opportunities across the region.”

NTIA received more than 1,800 applications proposing projects totaling nearly \$19 billion during the first BTOP funding round and is currently awarding grants on a rolling basis. NTIA is currently accepting BTOP applications through March 15, 2010 for a second round of funding.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided a total of \$7.2 billion to NTIA and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to fund projects that will expand access to and adoption of broadband services. Of that funding, NTIA will utilize \$4.7 billion for grants to deploy broadband infrastructure in the United States, expand public computer center capacity, and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service. NTIA will announce all grant awards by September 30, 2010.