



STATE OF VERMONT

June 11, 2009

The Vice President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

Thank you for your leadership implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). We greatly appreciate your frequent outreach to states and commitment to ensuring that federal dollars are spent quickly and wisely. We write to request your support for a proposal that will ensure the United States Department of Commerce, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Energy (DOE) create jobs and make smart investments in America's broadband and energy infrastructure in an expedited manner.

We are concerned that the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) have indicated that broadband funding may not be awarded until December of 2009, much too late for any Northern states to use the money during this construction season. This deadline is also painfully late for the states that have completed their planning and have projects ready to go. The DOE has also indicated that Smart Grid funding may not be awarded until after the 2009 construction season – putting at risk millions of dollars worth of investment this year that will postpone the recovery of our region's economy and the employment of thousands of people until next spring.

The Vermont Recovery Office has circulated a proposal to your staff that we believe will meet the federal agencies' needs to wisely implement these new hallmark programs of the recovery bill while at the same time meet the needs of states prepared to put federal dollars to work immediately building the next generation of telecommunications capabilities.

This proposal would direct the NTIA and RUS to use state certification to free up a fraction of the funds set aside for competitive broadband grants. DOE could also use state certification to do something similar with Smart Grid funds. As you know, certification has been used effectively in other ARRA programs to move funds quickly and responsibly. This broadband proposal would allow states to certify that they have done the mapping of their unserved populations, have projects ready to go which fit the definitions promulgated by the agencies and have at least a 20 percent match available.

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These states would then be able to draw down up to \$20 million in broadband funding and a similar figure for Smart Grid funding. States would remain eligible for additional competitive broadband or Smart Grid grants, but any funds used would be considered in future application review. The National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) has supported a similar proposal for more state involvement in broadband grants.

As we understand, NTIA, RUS, and DOE plan to release regulations for competitive grants by the end of June. Incorporating a simple certification process for 2009 projects in those regulations would ensure that the broadband and energy infrastructure of Northern states avoids unnecessary delays.

We would also urge the NTIA, RUS and DOE to review grant applications as they are submitted following the release of regulations and make funding determinations using a rolling application process. This process would retain the federal government's oversight of grant applications but ensure that funds are released in a timely manner.

Again, thank you for your leadership during this critical time in our nation's history. We look forward to continuing to work together to get our nation's economy moving again.

Respectfully,



James H. Douglas
Governor



Patrick J. Leahy
U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



Peter Welch
U.S. Representative