



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUN -7 2010

Mr. John N. Rose
President
Organization for the Promotion and Advancement
of Small Telecommunications Companies
2020 K Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. Rose:

Thank you for your letter of April 29, 2010, regarding my speech before the North American Agricultural Journalists.

In your letter you raise concerns about the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) proposal for broadband support. You suggest that it would create a rural/urban digital divide and jeopardize infrastructure investment, including Rural Utility Service loans. The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utility Service has reviewed the FCC proposal and has provided comments to FCC on ways to improve the proposal and support for rural America. Rest assured that we will continue to advise the FCC on ways to address the broadband needs to rural America.

This Administration is committed to universal broadband service, including service for rural America. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 authorized the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP); through which, USDA has invested nearly \$1.1 billion in 68 broadband infrastructure projects in rural America. Together, the projects will make high-speed Internet available to an estimated 529,000 households and 96,000 rural business and public facilities.

BIP applications received under round two are currently being reviewed, and I expect to make the final award announcements by the end of the current fiscal year. Finally, on May 7, 2010, USDA issued a Request for Proposal for \$105 million in grants for Satellite Projects, Rural Library Broadband Projects, and Technical Assistance Projects for unserved rural communities. The proposals are due by June 7, 2010.

Please be assured that this Administration has a strong commitment to high-speed broadband in rural America. Thank you for sharing your views on the broadband program.

Sincerely,

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

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary