

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 20, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1599

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20250-1599

Dear Secretaries Vilsack and Locke:

As the USDA and the NTIA begin to review the applications for the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) and the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program (BTOP) as funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, I would like to bring to your attention the proposals submitted by the applicants in Ohio.

Ohio has made significant progress in adoption, access, and affordability of broadband service. However, there are still many communities throughout the state – urban and rural – that remain without adequate broadband services. Over the past two years, I held roundtables with a cross-section of community leaders in each of Ohio's eighty-eight counties. One issue that was raised repeatedly at these meetings was the critical need for increased broadband capabilities in Ohio.

The lack of adequate broadband service is an issue that affects Ohioans from all walks of life, backgrounds, and professions. Librarians, teachers, and professors spoke of the need to create a level playing field for our children. Elected officials, business owners, and economic development directors pointed out how a lack of broadband access could stunt the potential of economic development for generations to come. For a young child, aspiring student, or entrepreneur, broadband access is a matter of equal opportunity. Providing this opportunity is vital, as unemployment in many of the underserved counties in Ohio is above 15 percent.

Earlier this month, my office held a workshop with organizations in Ohio to identify and review the application details of the broadband opportunities funded through the Recovery Act. We were very fortunate that Dallas Tonsager, USDA's Under Secretary for Rural Development, participated in this event along with other agency representatives and leaders throughout Ohio. It was encouraging to learn about the strong regional partnerships and collaborations that have emerged around the broadband opportunities. In my opinion, these efforts underscore the dire need for adequate broadband services in Ohio, and the willingness to work together in order to improve the quality of life for millions of Ohioans.

As the departments begin to review the applications, I am confident that you will find that the objectives of the initiatives in Ohio are closely aligned with the goals of the Broadband Initiatives Program and the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program. Please give serious consideration to these applications for funding. I ask that you keep my office informed on the status of these applications.

Thank you for your efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator