

Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke
Remarks Announcing \$25.4 Million Investment to
Increase High-speed Internet Access in Maine
Oron, Maine

It's wonderful to be up in Maine—and I want to begin by thanking you for rolling out the welcome mat for us today.

We have come here today to announce a critical investment in Maine's economy – an investment that will help put people back to work immediately and lay the groundwork for sustainable economic growth for years to come.

And those goals—more than any others—are the top priorities of the Obama administration.

Because today, too many people in Maine, and states across America, are out of work or wondering if their job is at risk. Too many are waking up every day having to make impossible choices no one in this country should ever have to make.

- Do I buy food or my medication?
- Do I pay the utility bill to keep the lights on or my mortgage to keep the creditors from calling?

This is completely unacceptable to President Obama, to me and to everyone else in this administration working to get our economy back on track.

We are of one mind: No matter what the economic indicators say, this country is not in an economic recovery until every American who wants a job can find one.

Lately, you have seen a quickening of the administration's economic recovery efforts, a quickening that underlines the sense of urgency we all feel.

Like last week, when President Obama unveiled an important set of new proposals to funnel resources to the small businesses that create almost seven out of 10 new jobs in America.

The president understands government alone can't solve our employment problem. And by offering new tax credits that incentivize small businesses to add and keep employees and to make new investments, the president is doing everything he can to encourage our businesses to start growing again.

This is but one of many ongoing efforts by the Administration to revitalize our economy, and today, I'm happy to discuss yet another important step we are taking in this direction.

Earlier today, Vice President Biden announced that we are investing \$182 million in Recovery Act funding in 18 high speed Internet expansion projects benefiting 17 states. This will kick off over \$2 billion in Recovery Act grants and loans that will be made on a rolling basis over the next 75 days to bring high speed Internet access to communities that currently have little or no access to the technology.

Some \$25.4 million of that funding is coming to Maine, and in the months and years ahead, it will help create a 1,100 mile network that has the potential to connect one-fifth of all Maine households to a high-speed, 21st century Internet backbone.

In the short term, this investment will help create jobs constructing the 36,000 new poles and installing the 1,100 miles of fiber-optic cable required for this high-tech infrastructure.

And like all good government investments, this is also going to kick-start the private sector into action.

The idea for high-speed Internet expansion has been advocated by consumer groups, Maine telecommunications providers and state agencies working on expanding rural broadband in Maine for years. But private companies just didn't think this type of basic infrastructure investment would be profitable.

This grant changes the game. As a direct result of this investment, over \$70 million in private-sector capital will be spent over the next three to five years to build

additional high speed Internet infrastructure that branches out from the network being built with government funding.

And 10 different Internet service providers have already expressed interest in buying capacity on this network that will allow them to deliver service to consumers and businesses.

This investment will also pay dividends in Maine for decades to come. Thanks to this funding:

- Hospitals like Eastern Maine Medical Center, and other large hospitals throughout the state will be able to diagnose injuries of patients in rural communities hundreds of miles away. This ability alone will provide more rapid care to critically injured patients, while rendering unnecessary, expensive, and potentially dangerous medical helicopter flights. In short, this will save money and it will save lives.
- Telemedicine also makes it much easier for rural medical professionals to use Internet video to learn new medical procedures from specialists at major healthcare facilities—as well as enabling ALL doctors to remotely monitor patients' vitals signs and medicine intake.
- Thanks to this funding, educational opportunity will be expanded as Internet connectivity is extended directly to 13 college campuses and over 200 government, health care and education facilities. Internet service will be drastically improved throughout the entire University of Maine system, and in particular:
 - At the regional campuses in Machias, Presque Isle, Farmington and Fort Kent;
 - As well as at Northern Maine, Eastern Maine and Washington County Community Colleges.
 - This means that students at these schools won't just be able to communicate with other campuses. It means they will now be able to access specialized coursework from other great educational institutions across the country and around the world that have distance learning programs.
- And finally, Maine businesses that have lacked access to reliable high-speed Internet access will be able to find consumers for their products or services virtually anywhere around the world.

These critical investments will be fixing an imbalance that has persisted in parts of America for far too long.

Having access to the Internet's economic, health and educational benefits should be as much of a fundamental American right as attending a quality school or feeling safe when you walk down the street.

But too many American communities today are stuck with 20th Century information tools that leave them ill-equipped to compete in today's global economy.

It negatively affects all Americans when we have so many school kids who can't get the information they need, rural doctors who can't connect to university medical centers and small businesses who can't offer their services to national and international markets.

Even though America invented the Internet, many other advanced economies now have better high-speed Internet access than we do.

Fast and reliable Internet service is widely available in many parts of America and virtually nonexistent in others.

That is simply unacceptable, and it hampers our economic growth.

Expanding high-speed Internet access is critical to improving America's economic competitiveness in the world.

Our best minds should be able to talk to one another, create, and innovate regardless of whether they're in Silicon Valley or here in Bangor.

That is why the Recovery Act allocated a grand total of \$7.2 billion to bring high-speed Internet access to rural, urban and other underserved parts of the country.

The grant I have announced here today in Maine is one of many more to come across America, and I want to congratulate all the people here today who navigated the grants process to bring these investments to Maine.\

Unless we use the 21st century tools at our disposal, America will never be as connected as it could be. And that connection is critical to our economic future.

Despite the difficult times we're in, America is slowly but surely starting to build a more prosperous and more sustainable future for its people. And the people of Maine are right at the forefront of that effort.

Thank you.