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SECRETARY LOCKE AND SENATOR LANDRIEU ANNOUNCE RECOVERY ACT INVESTMENT IN LOUISIANA TO EXPAND BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

WASHINGTON – U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke today, joined by Senator Mary Landrieu, announced an \$80 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) investment to help bridge the technological divide, boost economic growth, create jobs, and improve education and healthcare in Louisiana. The grant will bring high-speed Internet access to more than 80 community anchor institutions – including universities, K-12 schools, libraries, healthcare facilities – and lay the groundwork for bringing affordable broadband service to thousands of homes and businesses in the region.

The Louisiana Broadband Alliance, collaboration among six state agencies, plans to deploy more than 900 miles of fiber-optic network to expand broadband Internet service in some of the most economically distressed regions of Louisiana. The new network intends to provide direct connections for more than 80 community anchor institutions including universities, K-12 schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities. The 3,488-square-mile service area includes 12 impoverished parishes targeted by the state’s Louisiana Delta Initiative and a separate five-parish area that is home to four federally-recognized American Indian Tribes. The new network would connect to the Louisiana Optical Network Initiative (LONI), a more than 1,600 mile fiber-optic network that connects Louisiana and Mississippi research universities to National LambdaRail and Internet2.

“This critical investment will expand computer and high-speed Internet service access to Louisiana residents most in need, helping to make them full participants in today’s 21st century information economy, said Locke. “We are giving the people of Louisiana new tools to educate themselves, to promote their businesses and to create more opportunities for their families and their community.”

Earlier this week, Secretary Locke announced a \$1.4 million grant to the Deaf Action Center of Louisiana to provide on-demand, cost-effective sign language interpretation at community anchor institutions such as hospitals, courts, public safety agencies, shelters, schools and libraries.

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.

"Today, we have taken a big leap in our efforts to expand high-speed internet to throughout rural Louisiana, including the Delta parishes in the Northeast part of our state," Senator Landrieu said. "Creating jobs and spurring rural small business growth, these new funds will increase broadband capacity at our homes, schools, and hospitals to advance education, research, and healthcare delivery to areas in need of modern infrastructure. I am thankful for the Department of Commerce's support of this, and the many, innovative projects we have going on in Louisiana to improve broadband access."

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 for a second funding round. Applications for Public Computer Center and Sustainable Broadband Adoption projects are accepted through March 15, 2010 and Comprehensive Community Infrastructure projects are accepted through March 26, 2010.

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.

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