

# Biden unveils federal broadband stimulus projects

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(AP) -- Vice President Joe Biden on Thursday announced the first \$182 million in federal stimulus money for 18 projects to expand high-speed Internet networks in rural areas and other underserved communities.

Biden spoke at Impulse Manufacturing, a technologically advanced metalworks plant in north Georgia whose business has been held back by the lack of a broadband network in its part of the state.

The projects are the first part of a \$7.2 billion plan to bring high-speed Internet connections to rural areas, poor neighborhoods and Native American communities.

Besides Georgia, other projects in the first set will be in Maine, New Hampshire, Ohio, Arizona and Alaska.

Joined by Gov. Sonny Perdue, Biden told a crowd of workers, business leaders and lawmakers that creating the networks could help smaller businesses compete globally.

"We're forming the tools that will fashion the work of the 21st century," Biden said. "We are laying the foundation for the economy of tomorrow."

The administration plans to award a total of \$2 billion in grants and loans on a rolling basis over the next 75 days as it starts doling out the first round of stimulus funding for broadband, which Biden said could be

used to help struggling rural areas like Dawsonville with distance learning, telemedicine and real-time pricing for farmers.

He also tied broadband to the future success of the country's manufacturing industry and middle class.

"We were losing ground for the past 25 years in manufacturing," Biden said. "We don't want an economy built on another bubble. We want to do what our grandparents did ... and build on a solid foundation."

The Department of Agriculture also announced \$53.8 million in funding for eight projects on Thursday, and the Commerce Department announced \$129 million in funding for 10 projects. Those projects together also will put up another \$46 million in matching dollars.

The money is being targeted for "last-mile" connections that link homes, businesses and other end users to the Internet; "middle-mile" connections that link communities to the Internet backbone; computing centers in libraries, colleges and other public facilities; and adoption programs that teach people how to use the Internet and encourage them to sign up for broadband services.

The awards announced Thursday include:

- A \$33.5 million grant to the North Georgia Network Cooperative for a fiber-optic ring that will bring high-speed Internet connections to the northern Georgia foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The project will serve an eight-county area with a population of 334,000.
- A \$25.4 million grant to the Biddleford Internet Corp., a partnership between the University of Maine and service providers, to build three fiber-optic rings across rural Maine. The network will pass through more than 100 communities with 110,000 households and will connect 10

University of Maine campuses.

- A combined grant/loan of \$2.4 million to the Consolidated Electric Cooperative in north central Ohio to build a 166-mile fiber network that will be used, among other things, to connect 16 electrical substations to support a smart grid project.

Other projects receiving funds include a 4G wireless network to be built by an Alaska Native Corporation in southwestern Alaska, a fiber-to-the-home project in a remote corner of New Hampshire and computer centers for 84 libraries in Arizona.

Congress included \$7.2 billion for broadband projects in the stimulus bill to create jobs and bring new economic opportunities to parts of the country left behind in today's digital age. That includes \$4.7 billion to be awarded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, an arm of the Commerce Department, and \$2.5 billion to be awarded by the Rural Utilities Service, part of the Agriculture Department.

Demand for the broadband money has been intense - far outstripping the amount of federal dollars available. The Commerce and Agriculture Departments received nearly 2,200 applications submitted by local governments, inner-city community groups, rural cooperatives, non-profits and for-profit corporations in every corner of the country. They asked for a total of \$28 billion to pay for fiber-optic lines, wireless clouds, computer labs, Internet training programs, municipal communications networks and a range of other projects to bridge the so-called digital divide.

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