

U.S. Sens. Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders and Congressman Peter Welch said that a \$5.5 million stimulus broadband grant and loan package to Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom, announced today (Wednesday), will help connect their most rural and remote customers to high speed fiber optic internet access.

Vice President Joe Biden Wednesday was joined by representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and of the U.S. Department of Commerce in announcing that Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom would be receiving a \$3.891 million grant and \$1.668 million loan to extend a fiber-to-the-home network capable of delivering between 5 megabits per second and 100 megabits per second to 1,385 residents of Addison, Chittenden, and Washington Counties. According to Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom officials, these residents will be among some of the hardest to reach and hardest to serve in the company's territory.

"We are very pleased to be receiving this broadband stimulus funding which will have a direct benefit for many of our most rural customers," said Gregg Haskin president and CEO of Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom. "It is our goal to continue to evolve our network to bring next generation broadband service to our customers, and this will go a long way in helping us to accomplish this."

According to Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom officials, the company currently provides 100 percent of its customers with access to high speed internet connections. The company says it has begun construction of an advanced fiber optic network capable of delivering next generation services including exponentially faster internet speeds to its customers than the existing telephone system can. The federal grant and loan will ensure the most rural customers will have access to the network within three years.

Leahy said, "Without this investment, Vermonters living in the most remote parts of the Mad River Valley and the Champlain Valley could wait another decade before receiving state-of-the-art broadband. The Recovery Act is going to give people like those living in Lincoln Gap access to the same internet speeds as people in America's most populated cities, creating economic and social opportunities available only to those living on the cutting edge of technology." Leahy is the most senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which has jurisdiction over USDA and RUS, and wrote to President Obama and Senate leadership in 2007 and 2008 urging inclusion of broadband funds in the stimulus bill.

Sanders said, "In many places in Vermont, I hear from people who are extremely upset that in the year 2010, they still do not have the kind of high-speed broadband they need in order to function effectively in modern society. If we are successful in accomplishing what we all want, in a reasonable period of time Vermont will have high quality broadband service available to virtually every home and business in the state. This is great for our business climate, great for our schools and our students, and great for our larger institutions."

Welch said, "This is a common-sense investment that will build a solid foundation for economic growth. Connecting those in the most rural parts of our state to high-speed internet access has the potential to make every home a business, linking Vermont's entrepreneurs to the world." Welch is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet.

Leahy, Sanders and Welch wrote to RUS Administrator Jonathan Adelstein in May highlighting the Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom proposal and other Vermont proposals. A copy of that letter is available online at leahy.senate.gov.

The award is part of a \$7.2 billion broadband investment that was included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The USDA's RUS was charged with awarding \$2.5 billion of those funds to expand broadband access in rural America. Including Wednesday's announcement, Vermont has netted more than \$171 million in broadband infrastructure and adoption funds from the Recovery Act. On August 4th, the RUS announced a \$116 million grant and loan package to the Vermont Telephone Company (VTel) of Springfield to build a statewide wireless network and to enhance VTel's southern Vermont territory with an advanced fiber optic network. In July, the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) – which also administered a portion of the Recovery Act broadband funds -- awarded VTel a \$13.7 million grant to expand the company's mid-mile fiber backbone and connect anchor institutions. The NTIA also announced a \$33.4 million grant to the Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA).