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Broadband Initiative Stimulates Interest

The Obama Administration, under the rubric of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, poured a few more letters in the giant pot of acronym soup. Officially styled the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP), Congress has provided \$7.2 Billion to facilitate the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the United States.



The creation of this program, according to the BIP website is to "advance [the] objectives of the Recovery Act to spur job creation and stimulate long-term economic growth and opportunity." There's no certainty that this new project will accomplish that goal, but what is certain is that it has already added to the unwieldy size of the already over-reaching bureaucracy called the Department of Commerce.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a sub-directory of the Department of Commerce, in partnership with its sister agency, the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), will be the clearinghouse for applications and the distribution of the grant money. Under the terms of the program, NTIA has two weeks to dole out the initial outlay of \$4 Billion.

There is no shortage of hands being stuck out to grab a fistful of federal dollars. According to reports published in the *USA Today*, the NTIA and RUS has received 2,200 applications seeking \$28 Billion in stimulus package handouts. Sifting through these applications is no simple task as typical applications run to over 500 pages. Sample applications seek money to fund the extension of fiber optic cable directly into houses in the country and one to establish a center to educate the public to the benefits derived from using broadband in everyday life. Commercial entities aren't the only sector competing for funds. Libraries, state and local governments, non-profit groups, hospitals, and local telephone companies have all applied for grants under the BIP.

Despite the unexpected crush of applications received by the NTIA, the agency's chief of staff, Tom Power, is certain that his team is up to the challenge: "We've got to do it fast and do it right."

We'll wait and see as the words "fast" and "right" are rarely applied accurately to the actions of any aspect of the bloated behemoth that is the Federal Government.

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