

Biden Announces Rural Broadband Funding In Pa.

By Dan Nephin

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER
WATTSBURG, Pa. (AP) - Vice President Joe Biden outlined a \$4.7 billion loan and grant program Wednesday to develop the infrastructure needed to deliver broadband, or high-speed, Internet access to areas that are underserved or without access.

America lags behind more than a dozen other countries in terms of Internet access and that has to change, Biden told about 200 people at Seneca High School, about 12 miles east of Erie.

"The bottom line is, you can't function - a nation can't compete in the 21st century - without an immediate, high-quality access for everything from streaming video to information online," Biden said.

While Seneca has broadband Internet access, Biden said many students do not have access at home.

Providing the means for access would improve educational opportunities, he said. He also spoke of the power of the Internet to create jobs in rural America.

"We believe we are in the process of transforming rural America ... so it's integrated with the country, without losing its character," he said. The program also covers inner-city areas without broadband access.

"Getting broadband to every American is a priority for this administration," Biden said.

The \$4.7 billion is part of \$7.2 billion included in the federal stimulus package to improve rural Internet access.

The Commerce and Agriculture Departments on Wednesday published the criteria they will use to judge funding applications. They will consider projects that provide wired or wireless access starting at low-end DSL speeds, but will give priori-

ty to ones promising higher speeds. They'll consider an area "underserved" by broadband, and thus eligible for grants, if half or fewer of the households can get wired broadband today, among other criteria.

Applicants can begin applying on July 14. The first round of funding will be awarded in September. Besides providing money to create the infrastructure, the funding can also go toward training people to use the Internet.

In 2007 and 2008, the Pew Internet and American Life Project asked households that lacked broadband why they haven't signed up. Lack of availability was ranked fourth, given by 14 percent. Most answered that they didn't need the Internet, that it was too expensive or too hard to use. Many people who don't use the Internet simply don't have computers.

About 95 percent of households can already get broadband, according to the National Cable & Telecommunications Association. But the industry hasn't been very forthcoming in saying exactly where it's available, and

that's part of what the stimulus package wants to address - it has allocated \$350 million to mapping U.S. broadband access.

Biden appeared with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski and U.S. Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper, D-Pa., as part of a "rural America tour."

All spoke of the need for broadband access to create jobs and improve education and health care.

"Broadband is not just about being able to Google faster. It's not merely a luxury or an option for entertainment. It is an essential tool in today's world," Dahlkemper said.

Hann Named All-Star Player



Madison Hann, daughter of Anthony and Dawn Hann of Greencastle, finished her second season as an all-star player and a St. Thomas Angel.

Madison is also looking forward to her third year of baseball

in 2010 as a St. Thomas Chipmunk, and she will be going into the third grade.

She is the granddaughter of Susan Hann of McConnellsburg.



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