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Broadband Task Force Works To Use Stimulus Funds To Connect All Tennesseans

Members meet to examine how state can best utilize stimulus for broadband deployment

NASHVILLE – The Tennessee Broadband Task Force wants to ensure that Tennessee takes full advantage of funds allocated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to connect all Tennesseans. Task Force members met Thursday to receive information on how all Tennessee communities could best benefit from funds available to the state for broadband connectivity and to examine possible strategies to ensure Tennessee has a voice in the direction of how those funds are used here. The members heard from the state’s primary federal recovery act manager, Mike Morrow, and the Tennessee Regulatory Authority’s chief economist, Jerry Kettles.

“Now is the time and the opportunity for every county to be connected to the information interstate. Our jobs and our children’s education depend upon broadband access,” said Sen. Roy Herron, who co-chairs the task force with Rep. Mark Maddox. “Tomorrow’s jobs and the world’s finest libraries and teachers can be ours with broadband access.”

Nationally ARRA will provide \$7.2 billion for programs to spur broadband deployment at the state level. Tennessee may receive in excess of \$150 million to continue its efforts to ensure the entire state benefits from connectivity.

“This is a great opportunity for our state to take advantage of the federal stimulus resources and make a very tangible investment for our citizens,” said Rep. Maddox. “With stakeholders from every facet of the diverse broadband industry, we are uniquely positioned to pursue these funds.”

The Task Force agreed to collaborate to submit comment to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utility Service (RUS) in order to promote the interests of Tennesseans concerning the distribution of the broadband stimulus funds.

The General Assembly approved legislation in 2005 to create the 14-member task force and gave it a charge to examine the deployment of broadband in the state. The task force is comprised of many relevant stakeholders from the telecommunications and cable television industries along with elected officials and government regulators and can be of great assistance in helping inform decisions concerning the best use of broadband stimulus funds in the state.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will speed economic recovery, create and save jobs and provide needed services to Tennesseans. For more information, visit www.tnrecovery.gov or www.recovery.gov.

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