

The chairs of the Rural Telecommunications Task Force are circulating a letter to colleagues expressing concern about recent changes to the Commerce Department's process for awarding broadband stimulus money.

The letter, sent by Reps. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) and Lee Terry (R-Neb.), asks other House members to send a letter to Larry Strickling, Assistant Secretary in charge of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The NTIA is charged with allocating more than \$4 billion in stimulus awards for broadband expansion problems in underserved areas.

During the first round of awards, existing broadband providers had 30 days to challenge stimulus applications that propose building networks in areas they already serve. This was intended to ensure stimulus money would not go to regions that already had broadband service.

But under the rules for the second round of awards, NTIA wants to shorten the window for existing providers to review projects to 15 days.

"This shortened window will be unworkable for many rural broadband providers and increases the risk of wasting taxpayer money," the "dear colleague" letter said.

Strickling will testify on the progress of the broadband stimulus spending during an oversight hearing by the House Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet. Stupak and Terry sit on that panel and will likely bring up the review period change.

"As we work together to develop policies that will expand broadband access to all Americans, we strongly believe that funding already-served areas with broadband stimulus money is not good public policy and will undermine future efforts to achieve broadband access to unserved rural Americans," says the letter Stupak and Terry plan to send to Strickling. Source: <http://thehill.com/blogs/hillicon-valley/technology/84891-stupak-lee-worry-administrations-change-will-lead-to-wasted-stimulus-dollars> The contents of this site are © 2010 Capitol Hill Publishing Corp., a subsidiary of News Communications, Inc.



