

## WBR ARTICLE

### Wyo broadband could gain \$60 million in stimulus monies

By Tim Monroe

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CHEYENNE — Congress is considering a section of the economic stimulus appropriations bill that would give Wyoming about \$60 million for contracts to deploy high speed communications service into rural areas not now connected to the Internet. Information provided by Qwest, the state's dominant telecommunications provider, notes that some 94,000 Wyoming residents could benefit from the stimulus package when the work is completed.

Qwest spokeswoman Johnna Hoff noted that if the broadband proposal were approved, it would cost an estimated \$3 billion to do the work in the company's 14-state service area. Legislation that passed the U.S. House of Representatives provides \$6 billion in broadband grants that could be used for first-time deployments into unserved areas and for upgrades to existing networks. The Senate version of an economic stimulus bill apparently includes \$9 billion for the grant program.

Each state would receive the stimulus money and the existing economic development agency in the state would seek bids from providers. Many telecommunications companies have stated that the \$6 billion is insufficient to fund facilities that would reach 95 percent of the unserved potential customers. The former Wyoming Telecommunications Council identified, through a private contractor, "gap" areas in the state where high speed broadband services were not available.

The funds would pay for engineering and planning of facilities to be deployed, construction, splicing and installation work to install fiber infrastructure and to add new equipment at central offices and field locations.