

Rep. Novak: Supports bill to increase funding for rural broadband

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 14, 2017

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MADISON – Rep. Novak (Dodgeville) has co-sponsored LRB 2042, a collaborative rural broadband expansion bill authored by Senator Howard Marklein (Spring Green). This legislation is a product of the efforts of both the 2016 Study Committee on Rural Broadband and a 2016 proposal by Governor Scott Walker.

“This bill is the first step towards addressing the issues we are facing with broadband access by making changes in the current fiscal year. These reforms will lay the groundwork upon which we can expand during and after the passage of the budget.”

The proposed legislation allocates an additional \$15.5 million for broadband grants using surplus funds from the Universal Service Fund, the federal e-rate program, and unencumbered balances from other USF-funded appropriations. In addition, this bill focuses these resources on areas in Wisconsin with the greatest need in order to address this problem from the bottom up.

The Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) program will receive an additional \$7.5 million from the federal e-rate program in order to improve information technology infrastructures. The eligibility criteria for this grant has been changed to include slightly larger school districts with a membership of 2,500 or less.

“These funds along with more comprehensive guidelines on the process by which these grants are awarded stand to benefit our rural communities, and I look forward to helping move this bill quickly through the legislature.”