

# Connect Americans Now: New coalition aims to eliminate the digital divide in rural Wisconsin

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*Innovators & rural advocates join forces to deploy TV white spaces technology for high-speed broadband coverage across rural America*

**Washington, D.C.** - Rallying around a plan to eliminate the digital divide by 2022, a diverse group of community leaders, rural advocates and top innovators today announced the national launch of Connect Americans Now ([www.connectamericansnow.com](http://www.connectamericansnow.com)) and the formation of local partnerships in Wisconsin. The new alliance will work with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and other policymakers to ensure that there is sufficient unlicensed low band spectrum in every market in the country to enable broadband connectivity.

“All Americans – regardless of where they live – deserve access to high-speed internet,” said Richard T. Cullen, Executive Director of Connect Americans Now (CAN). “Without a broadband connection, millions of students struggle to keep up with their assignments, Americans in rural areas are unable to fully utilize telemedicine, farmers are denied the promise of precision agriculture and businesses are unable to tap into the world of online commerce. Congress and the FCC must stand with rural America by allowing internet service providers to deliver broadband via white spaces spectrum.”

CAN’s local partners in Wisconsin include the Wisconsin Technology Council, Wisconsin Economic Development Association, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance,

and Wisconsin Coalition of Virtual School Families. CAN's national founding members include Microsoft, ACT: The App Association, the National Rural Education Association, the Schools, Health and Library Broadband Coalition, Axiom, the Mid-Atlantic Broadcasting Communities Corporation, HTS Ag, and others. They also are spearheading an advocacy campaign in Washington, D.C., where FCC regulators have the authority to make sufficient unlicensed spectrum available in each market for high-speed internet.

"Fast, reliable internet access has the power to help businesses reach new markets, create jobs, and improve educational opportunities by connecting students in innovative and engaging ways," said Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker [in a recent statement](#). "Our budget provides an additional \$35.5 million for broadband expansion, but there is an opportunity to do more, which is why we are calling on the FCC to finalize rules advancing this technology. The FCC is considering rules which could result in at least three white space channels in every U.S. market to provide broadband Internet. If approved, the private sector is poised to provide underserved communities with access to robust, affordable broadband."

"Nothing is more critical to improving the quality of rural education than bridging the digital divide," Kim Kaukl, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance. "That's why WISRA and the National Rural Education Association are joining forces with Connect Americans Now, a broad coalition advocating the expansion of broadband access. Connect Americans Now has a plan to eliminate the digital divide by taking advantage of TV White Spaces - unused spectrum in the UHF television bands."

The plan endorsed by CAN will rapidly accelerate the deployment - and reduce the cost - of high-speed internet service for 23.4 million rural Americans who live each day without broadband access. It does so by taking advantage of unused but powerful bandwidth below the 700 MHz frequency range, also known as TV white spaces, made available on an unlicensed basis. Wireless signals in this range can travel over hills and through buildings and trees and therefore are great for last mile broadband access in rural areas.

From education to telemedicine and precision agriculture to business development, closing the digital divide could transform the lives and livelihoods of rural Americans from all walks of life.

**Implications of the Digital Divide in Wisconsin and around the U.S.**

- 6.5 million students lack access to high speed internet, but 70 percent of teachers assign homework that requires a broadband connection. More than 163,000 Wisconsin students reside in rural areas, where more students struggle to keep up with their assignments and fail to learn the computer skills they need to succeed and enter college or the workforce.
- Telemedicine could collectively save lives and millions of dollars annually for underserved patients and rural hospitals that pay up to three times more for broadband than their urban counterparts. Forty-five percent of Wisconsin's hospitals are in rural areas, and broadband connectivity could allow their patients, regardless of where they live, to access specialists and benefit from advanced monitoring services that would normally require hours of travel for patients or their providers.
- Wisconsin is home to more than 69,000 farms, and broadband access could bring them promise of precision agriculture, including remote monitoring equipment that helps farmers save money by optimizing irrigation, conserving resources and increasing yields. It also allows farmers to search for new customers, find buyers willing to pay higher prices and identify the most affordable sources of seeds, fertilizers and farm equipment.
- Small businesses employ half of Wisconsin's workforce, and broadband access will drive economic growth and job opportunities by enabling them to expand their customer base from local to global and attract new industries to rural communities.
- High-speed internet supports workforce development by allowing rural job seekers to access services online, develop new skills through cloud-based training and secure additional employment opportunities like remote teleworking. It will also allow rural communities to keep and attract new workers who require a broadband connection to carry out their daily responsibilities.

## **About Connect Americans Now**

Connect Americans Now is a group of concerned citizens, local organizations, rural advocates and leading innovators committed to eliminating the digital divide that is holding back rural America. Our goal is to bring rural Americans who currently lack connectivity safe and affordable broadband access by 2022 so they can take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities that exist in other communities.