

# Jon Erpenbach: Disappointing failure on rural economic development money

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The only silver lining for rural Wisconsin to the Foxconn 4.5 billion in tax dollars was the introduction of a bill that granted \$50 million a year to rural Wisconsin communities for economic development. While \$50 million seems dwarfed by the billions Foxconn will get, at least it was something. Somehow after passing the Joint Committee on Finance, which I am a member of, and the State Assembly this bill died in the Senate. Clearly the votes were there. It passed out of the Joint Committee on Finance unanimously and passed out of the Assembly 95 to 0.

The disappointment here is great because the bill planned to allocate a strong amount of flexible funds to rural Wisconsin to improve economic development outcomes. I voted for this bill because I could envision transportation and infrastructure needs, redevelopment of downtowns that have been so hurt by Governor Walker's opposition to the Historic Tax Credit and creative partnerships to support growing smaller businesses in every corner of the 27th Senate District. I am not sure who supported killing this bill that was authored by Republican Representative Tranel at the request of Governor Walker, but I am sure curious.

No one has been hurt more in this state and been slower to recover after the 2008 economic crisis than our rural communities. Places like Milwaukee have been more successful in their recovery because there is easy access to the high tech and infrastructure needs that businesses need to grow in an emerging market. Communities that are more rural are pounding the pavement every day just trying to get a broadband provider interested in wiring their whole community. Ten miles out of the Madison metropolitan area are communities without functioning broadband working to rebuild and redevelop just to survive.

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I have heard that the Rural Economic Development program may come back next session but with less money. I hope it does come back, but with more money. We need to support our rural communities. Local governments just do not have the means to help with crippling caps on spending from the state. If we can afford \$4.5 billion for Foxconn, we can afford \$50 million a year for our rural communities.

— *Erpenbach, D-Middleton, represents the 27th Senate District.*