McCabe campaign: High-speed Internet everywhere in Wisconsin in five years under McCabe plan

Posted on Tuesday, Apr 17, 2018

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Media Contact: Christine Welcher
Campaign Manager
Phone: 608-279-2733
Email address: christine@governorbluejeans.com

APRIL 17, 2018 – With Wisconsin ranked 49th in the country in Internet speed, Wisconsin governor candidate Mike McCabe today put forward a transformative plan to bring high-speed Internet to every part of the state within five years, funded by savings gleaned from ending two unsuccessful state subsidy programs he has targeted for elimination.

"This is about looking out for each other and making sure everyone in our state has this 21st Century necessity and no one is left behind," McCabe said.

Broadband experts estimate building the capacity to make high-speed Internet service available to all parts of Wisconsin will cost close to $1 billion. McCabe's plan calls for additional funding in the state budget of $200 million a year for five years to accomplish the task.

A key feature of the plan is the removal of state policy barriers to the participation of cities, villages, towns, counties, rural cooperatives and nonprofit enterprises in building out high-speed networks and providing Internet service. State preemption policies currently block such efforts, giving private telecommunications companies a corner on the broadband market. Municipalities, counties, rural co-ops and nonprofits such as BadgerNet and WiscNet would be authorized to offer Internet

service in Wisconsin and eligible to apply for the new state funding, as would private telecoms.

"Wisconsin can settle for nothing less than high-speed Internet everywhere," McCabe said. "We need all hands on deck to reach this goal in five years. It won't happen if it's just left to the telecoms. It's not profitable for them to take on the expense of building out networks to many rural parts of the state when they will pick up so few additional customers. This needs to be a public-private partnership."

Closing the state's corporate giveaway office and ending taxpayer-subsidized private schooling, as McCabe has proposed, saves close to $700 million for the state's next two-year budget. Part of those savings will go to fund the Internet expansion plan, with the rest going to improve higher education affordability in Wisconsin.

"Wisconsin's future depends on making necessary investments in broadband infrastructure so high-speed Internet can reach every doorstep in the state. It's not possible to fully participate in the 21st Century economy or modern society without this tool," McCabe said. "Dead zones so commonly found in rural areas and in inner city neighborhoods contribute significantly to rising economic and social inequality. The Internet is a basic necessity in this day and age and way too many people in Wisconsin don't have it."

McCabe's plan also calls for Wisconsin to join other states in suing to block the Federal Communications Commission's repeal of Net Neutrality protections last December. Net Neutrality prohibited Internet service providers from charging their customers different rates or slowing service based on who they were, what websites they visited or what browsing platform they used. The FCC's action also seeks to prohibit state and local governments from creating rules of their own. McCabe's plan calls for just such state intervention to protect consumers. He proposes prohibiting any Internet service provider in Wisconsin from blocking web content or offering faster service to websites that pay a premium.

Before the FCC's vote in December, McCabe submitted a statement to the commission warning that repealing Net Neutrality protections would open the door to "Internet Apartheid" and would "accelerate the growth of inequality by clearing the way for the creation of what could effectively become two separate Internets – an ultra-fast and comprehensive one for those who can afford to pay substantial premiums for access and a far slower and more limited one for everyone else. This

would make it even more difficult for those who have been losing ground to compete economically and fully participate in modern American life."

McCabe has been an advocate of Internet freedom and a defender of Net Neutrality for many years, dating back to his time leading the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, which in 1996 created and published online the state's first and only searchable database of political donors and has updated and expanded the online money tracking tool ever since.