

Sen. Cowles: Thousands of lead water pipes being removed thanks to loan program

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As Future of Federal Funding is Uncertain, Wisconsin Is Ready to Rid Our State of Lead Pipes

GREEN BAY– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after Governor Scott Walker announced more than \$26 million in federal funding distributed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as principal forgiveness loans, which effectively operate as grants, to assist communities in replacing lead service lines connecting a house to a water main, usually under a road:

“Wisconsin has over 170,000 lead service lines, and an EPA study showed that the number of Wisconsin children poisoned by lead is higher than the national average. The Safe Drinking Water Loan Program has helped communities to address the public health concerns that thousands of Wisconsin citizens, especially children are faced with every day from lead laden drinking water. Exposure to lead, especially for children and pregnant women, can lead to a number of negative health effects, including developmental delays, learning difficulties and birth defects.

“Today’s announcement to distribute another \$26 million over two years to 42 Wisconsin communities will only further our state’s efforts towards creating communities where every single Wisconsinite can rely on clean and safe water coming out of their faucet. While this funding will help make large dents in the quantity of lead pipes in our state, we’re still a ways from a lead-free Wisconsin. While states throughout the nation struggle with the realization that federal funding past Fiscal Year 2018 is uncertain, Wisconsin has already taken the bold step of passing one of the nation’s first bills to rid our communities of lead pipes.

“The Leading on Lead Act, which I authored and passed last session as 2017 Wisconsin Act 137 with my co-author Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac), gives municipalities the tools and funding structure they need to remove the lead pipes. While the scope of the problem in each community is different, the local control provided by this bill will help to remove this harmful water infrastructure while addressing one of the largest public health concerns Wisconsin families face. It is my hope that we see more communities in the near future work locally to rid Wisconsin of lead water pipes.”