

# WSTA: Applauds Senate Passage of Rural Broadband Investment Legislation

Posted on Thursday, Feb 20, 2020

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Madison, WI - Wisconsin's premier telecommunications industry association applauds last night's unanimous, bipartisan Senate floor vote in support of Assembly Bill 344 (AB 344). The Senate voted 33-0 in support of legislation to incentivize rural broadband deployment through targeted tax exemptions for investments in rural or underserved communities.

"WSTA is extremely pleased to see AB 344 complete the legislative process with another strong bipartisan vote." said Bill Esbeck, executive director of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA). "Wisconsin lawmakers understand rural broadband expansion is not a partisan issue and this legislation will help our members stretch their working capital in rural areas. Simply put, the bill will help connect more broadband customers in rural and underserved Wisconsin."

Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and Representative Romaine Quinn (R-Cameron) authored AB 344 and the companion bill, Senate Bill 321. The legislation creates property tax exemptions for telephone company property used to provide broadband service to a rural or underserved area. Unlike most Wisconsin property taxes, which are paid to local governments, the telephone company property tax is paid to the state. Because the telephone company property tax is collected by the state, there is no fiscal impact on local governments.

"WSTA thanks Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau), Senator Marklein and their colleagues on both sides of the aisle for the commitment to broadband expansion in rural and underserved communities," Esbeck continued. "Last week's voice vote in the Assembly and last night's unanimous roll call vote in the Senate

demonstrate the bipartisan support of policies to promote rural broadband.”

The targeted exemption for new investments and existing investments is also a step toward a level playing field between cable companies and telephone companies. Cable companies in Wisconsin already enjoy a property tax exemption on the infrastructure they use to offer their voice, video and broadband triple play. A traditional telephone company offering the same voice, video and broadband triple play is currently paying the telephone company property tax on their infrastructure. This legislation helps level the competitive playing field.

The policy in AB 344 will complement existing state and federal programs focused on broadband deployment. In the 2019-2021 Biennial Budget, the Legislature approved and Governor Evers signed an historic increase in funding for the Broadband Expansion Grant Program.