

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Wisconsin supports bipartisan infrastructure legislation's expansion of affordable and reliable broadband

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Washington, D.C. – Wisconsin business, education and local leaders are praising U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin's support for bipartisan infrastructure legislation, which was signed into law by President Joe Biden yesterday and will help connect every Wisconsinite to reliable high-speed internet.

More than 13.9% of Wisconsin residents currently live in areas where, by one definition, there is no broadband infrastructure that provides minimally acceptable speeds, and 69% of Wisconsin residents live in areas where there is only one such provider. With the bipartisan legislation supported by Senator Baldwin and signed into law by President Biden, Wisconsin will receive a minimum allocation of \$100 million to help provide broadband coverage across the state, including providing access to the at least 318,000 Wisconsin residents who currently lack it. And, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, 1,246,000 or 22% of people in Wisconsin will be eligible for the Affordability Connectivity Benefit, which will help low-income families afford internet access.

“This bipartisan legislation signed by President Biden will help build a stronger economy and make a real difference in the lives of Wisconsin working families,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “This investment will expand access to affordable and reliable high speed broadband for Wisconsin families, students, small businesses, and farmers. I am proud to stand on the side of delivering results for

Wisconsin.”

This major federal investment in Wisconsin’s broadband infrastructure was endorsed by business, education, and local leaders from across the state.

“We realize the necessity to make sure all areas in our region have affordable broadband access,” **said Barb Lamue, president and CEO of New North, Inc.** “Increased investment in broadband in our communities will help the New North region attract and retain businesses and jobs, spurring private investment and advancing economic resiliency.”

“On behalf of the D.C. Everest Area School District, I would like to thank Senator Tammy Baldwin for supporting the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will expand access to broadband services across Wisconsin and make internet services more affordable by boosting competition, enhancing transparency concerning service plans, and providing low-income families access to connectivity through the Affordability Connectivity Benefit program,” **said Dr. Kristine Gilmore, Superintendent of the D.C. Everest Area School District.** “High-speed internet access unlocks countless opportunities for our students — making it possible for them to access personalized instructional tools and educational materials, collaborate virtually with their peers, expand their technological skills, and explore the world around them. We support efforts to bring reliable connectivity to all of our nation’s students – an investment in the U.S. workforce that will benefit families, communities and our nation for years to come.”

“Residents and learners in north central Wisconsin should have equitable access to high-speed, affordable and reliable broadband internet. Digital equity and inclusion ensures that all learners have the ability to access higher education opportunities that will improve their employability and help them positively contribute to the local economy,” **said Dr. Jeannie Worden, President of Northcentral Technical College.** “By providing equitable access to high-speed broadband, we can ensure an enhanced digital learning experience for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status. This is especially imperative for learners at Northcentral Technical College, as 70 percent of the College’s post-secondary students receive some type of financial aid.”

“I’m pleased that the Senate made digital equity a priority in the bipartisan infrastructure package. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it’s absolutely critical for residents to have access to educational and employment opportunities in our digitally connected world,” **said Katie Rosenberg, Mayor of Wausau.** “I’m hopeful that these policy initiatives will connect central Wisconsinites to opportunities that allow them to stay here, work here, raise their families here, and help us reinvigorate our local economy.”

## **Connecting Every Wisconsinite to Affordable and Reliable High-Speed Internet**

**Broadband Deployment Funding:** The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act creates a new Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration at the Department of Commerce. This \$42.5 billion program provides grants to states to increase connectivity to underserved and high-cost areas. Each state will receive a minimum of \$100 million, with the remainder of funds allocated using a formula based on the number of underserved or high-cost areas within a state relative to the number across the U.S. States can then provide subgrants for broadband service projects, connecting “anchor institutions” such as a library or school, providing internet-capable devices, supporting data collection or mapping, or other projects that further the goal of increasing connectivity. Recipients will generally be required to provide a 25% match, which could be reduced or waived and could come from COVID relief funds, among other sources. In addition, the bill provides an additional \$2 billion for USDA’s broadband loans and grants, with the bulk of those funds going to the agency’s major broadband deployment program, ReConnect. The ReConnect Program makes loans, grants and loan/grant combinations available on a competitive basis to technology companies, cooperatives, and state, local and tribal governments.

**Affordable Connectivity Program:** The bipartisan infrastructure legislation extends the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program first enacted in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act in December 2020, through which the FCC reimburses broadband providers for

discounts to eligible households. The bill provides an additional \$14.2 billion for the Affordable Connectivity Program, and provides a maximum monthly subsidy of \$30. According to the White House, 1.2 million Wisconsinites will be eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Benefit.

**Digital Equity:** The bipartisan infrastructure legislation includes several programs to increase “digital equity” to ensure that communities and populations have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States. It provides \$60 million for grants to states to develop digital equity plans, and \$1.44 billion from 2022 through 2026 for capacity grants to states to implement their plans. The bill also provides \$1.25 billion over five years for a Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program to support state, local, and tribal governments, as well as nonprofits or private entities that aren’t responsible for carrying out the state program.

**Middle Mile:** The bipartisan infrastructure legislation includes \$1 billion over five years for grants to support the construction, improvement, or acquisition of middle mile projects that connect network infrastructure to limit single points of failure. These competitive grants will be available on a technology-neutral basis to state, local and tribal governments, technology companies, utilities, nonprofit entities, regional planning councils and economic development authorities.