

Sen. Marklein: The battle for better broadband continues

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The Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) recently announced the awards for the most recent round of Rural Broadband Expansion Grants. They awarded 71 grants worth \$124,967,392 out of the \$125 million I fought for in the state budget.

The 17th Senate District received four awards worth \$16,601,447. These projects are in Juneau, Richland, Grant and Lafayette counties. Only 16% of the applications submitted by communities in the 17th District were selected. There were 20 other projects that did not receive awards.

I am happy for the communities that received awards. They will each have a significant impact and reach new households that have been waiting for connections. But I am frustrated by the PSC's direction and dismissal of several important projects. There were five projects for rural Grant County, proposed by TDS Telecom, that were denied for the second time. After the last grant round, TDS revamped the projects, per the recommendations by the PSC, but they were passed over again. These communities are desperate for service and continue to wait!

This is not to say that the 17th Senate District hasn't had tremendous success utilizing the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant program. Since the program started in 2014, we have received funding for 42 projects worth \$39 million in grant funding with a \$43 million match. In total, we have invested \$82 million in broadband in our communities. This funding has created or improved connections for 81,874 households and 6,848 businesses in the eight years since the program started!

But I know there is still work to do. We must find a way to reach the areas that are tough to reach and very expensive to finance. This was clearly illustrated by the 20 projects that did not receive funding this cycle.

I believe that the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant program needs to be overhauled and adjusted to reach the households, communities and businesses that are still not connected. I am working on a proposal that I plan to bring back to the legislature in the new session to achieve our goals. I have been fighting the battle for better broadband since 2014 and I am not done yet.

Thank you to all of the community leaders, telecommunications companies and individual champions who have worked so hard to expand rural broadband into our communities. You have made a tremendous impact, but there is still work to do. I am here with you - all of the way.

The 17th Senate District projects that received funding in the most recent grant cycle include:

LaValle Telephone Cooperative - Juneau County - Fiber to the premise to reach five business and 285 residential locations in the towns of Lindina, Plymouth, Summit and Wonewoc. This includes 290 currently unserved locations. (Award: \$2,931,908, Match: \$1,578,788) Ma

LaValle Telephone Cooperative - Richland County - Fiber to the premise to reach three business and 457 residential locations in the towns of Ithaca, Richland, Rockbridge and Willow. This includes 460 currently unserved locations. (Award: \$3,529,430, Match: \$2,352,950)

LICT Corporation (aka - Cuba City Telephone) - Grant and Lafayette Counties - Fiber to the premise service to reach 117 business and 1,604 residential locations. This includes eight currently unserved locations. (Award: \$7,955,000, Match: \$7,955,000)

LYNXX Networks - Juneau County - Fiber to the premise to reach 20 businesses and 862 residential locations in the towns of Lemonweir and Lisbon. This includes 100 currently unserved locations. (Award: \$2,185,109, Match: \$2,896,541)