

State officials praise \$1 billion in federal broadband money

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Public Service Commission Chairperson Rebecca Valcq praised a \$1.05 billion investment in broadband for the state, saying along with public and private dollars, the funding “will make it possible to achieve our goal of internet for all.”

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, and U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, also applauded the investment, which comes after the GOP-run Joint Finance Committee didn’t put any state money toward broadband expansion grants in the state budget.

JFC Republicans said they would rely on federal dollars coming to the state as they rejected the \$750 million in state money that Dem Gov. Tony Evers had proposed for the work. JFC Co-chairs Rep. Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam, and Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The federal money announced Monday will be provided under the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program created in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law signed by President Biden two years ago. The funding is part of more than \$42 billion in grants across the country, according to a White House release.

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The PSC earlier this year indicated it expected the state to receive between \$700 million and \$1.1 billion. Wisconsin is one of 19 states to receive more than \$1 billion under the program.

White House senior adviser Mitch Landrieu in a press call with Pocan and Baldwin Monday said the next step is for Evers to submit a plan to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. He said once the NTIA signs off on the plan, 20 percent of the funds will be allocated. He said construction will

likely begin early next year.

Baldwin said the investment is long overdue. She said about 650,000 Wisconsinites don't have access to high-speed internet, while another 650,000 can't afford it.

"Simply put, we are leaving these Wisconsinites behind and that's unacceptable," she said.

Pocan said broadband is essential.

"I'll tell you, these days having broadband is like having water or electricity in your home. You absolutely have to have it," he said.

Pocan noted many people in his district and across the state still don't have affordable broadband, arguing it is a "lifeline" for commerce.

See Baldwin's release [here](#).

See Valcq's statement [here](#).

GOP U.S. Reps. Tom Tiffany, of Minocqua, and Glenn Grothman, of Glenbeulah, recently introduced legislation seeking to expand broadband access in rural areas by eliminating reporting requirements for smaller broadband companies.

Under the bill, rural broadband providers with under 2,000 investors would not need to follow U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission public reporting requirements. Currently, broadband providers with at least 500 investors must follow the requirements.

"Instead of being able to supply rural America with high-speed broadband networks, our local providers are caught up in Washington's bureaucratic red tape. This bipartisan bill will give small broadband providers the tools to expand quality internet access across rural America," Tiffany said.

See the release [here](#).