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STATE SENATOR

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Sen. Pfaff Column: Broadband is Vital to our Economy and Way of Life

As we work to get through these tough times together, we still have to tackle one major challenge that existed before the coronavirus began — the lack of broadband internet access. This comes as no shocker for those of us here in western Wisconsin. For far too many families, business owners, and communities, slow or nonexistent internet is like the weather -- something you just deal with. I refuse to believe it has to be this way, and I won't give up until we fix it.

Solving this problem isn't only about promoting remote work or small business connectivity. It goes beyond students learning from home and grandparents video chatting with their far-flung relatives. Closing the internet connectivity gap is central to supporting the rural way of life that has defined much of Wisconsin for generations. That's why I'm glad to serve on the [Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access](#) and why I'm supporting Governor Tony Evers' call for a much needed \$200 million investment to close the digital divide. In the next three years, under this plan, we'll invest significantly more in broadband access than we have in previous budgets.

It may sound strange, but getting high-speed internet for everyone is an important way to lift up and improve our quality of life. People aren't moving away from small towns to avoid the natural beauty or the sense of community; instead, too often they leave because of a lack of opportunity to compete for the jobs of today and tomorrow. I grew up on a dairy farm and my family still works the land to this day. For many, farming isn't just a job, it's a way of life. High-speed, reliable, and affordable internet provides opportunities for not just our farm families but for all of us.

With broadband and expanded internet, our small business owners, family farmers, food processors, manufacturers, health care industry, education system, to name a few, can continue to grow, prosper and employ more people. Slow and unreliable internet needs to be a thing of the past. Approximately 430,000 Wisconsin residents lack sufficient broadband access. That means 25% of rural residents across the state aren't on a level playing field in the 21st-century economy.

Solving this problem helps everyone — whether it's a farmer who relies on reliable internet to get his product to market or a coffee shop on Main Street upgrading their Point of Service system to increase efficiency. As we continue learning, working, and connecting from home during this global pandemic, we have the perfect opportunity to roll up our sleeves and get shovel-ready broadband projects off the ground.

Investing in public-private partnerships is also key to serving the unique needs of every community. Through innovation, community support, and the help of state and federal broadband grants and loans, communications cooperatives have become advanced and reliable providers of rural broadband services. When we give local providers the resources they need to succeed, they can keep costs low, upgrade their technology, and reach more people.

Interconnectedness has existed in rural Wisconsin communities for over a century, but now more than ever, we need the power of technology to keep us connected. Broadband is no longer a luxury; it's a necessity. Telemedicine, virtual learning, and business development all rely on strong digital capabilities to power their operations. I will work with anyone in any party to ensure that every Wisconsinite has fast, reliable, and affordable internet access.

MEDIA NOTE: See email attachment for an official photo of Sen. Pfaff

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.