



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

March 9, 2018

Bringing Technology Home

I had the chance to address the Wisconsin Telecommunications Association this week at their annual legislative day, and I thought it might be a good opportunity to share with you some of the good things that have happened and that I've supported this legislative session down in Madison related to advancing technological efforts back here at home.

First, in case you're curious, the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA) has been around since about the early 1900s, and vows to serve as a unified voice for its members in matters of interest to legislators, regulators, and the public. The association represents more than 70 Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (local telephone companies), Internet Service Providers, and Wireless Carriers. You're probably familiar with Lynxx/Lemonweir Valley Telcom from Camp Douglas. They're an example of a WSTA member and service provider we have in our part of the state.

I'll admit that I was a bit surprised by the invite to address the body, but I was happy to attend. One of the reasons I was happy to attend is because the organizations represented are those that are really on the front lines of delivering the internet and connectivity services we depend on in the more sparsely populated parts of our state. For example, these organizations are the ones charged with implementing some of the ideas I get from you as constituents, and the issues we deal with as a legislative body. As I shared with their members, connectivity is so important for us in virtually all aspects of our modern life. It affects our social lives, our work lives, healthcare services, education, and more.

Another reason I was happy to attend was to share some of the things we've done in the legislature this session that will have an impact in our area and across the state. First, in this session's state budget, we increased funding for the Broadband Expansion grant program by over \$20 million, utilizing a proposal brought forth from Rural Wisconsin Initiative – a group of outstate legislators I'm a member of, devoted to giving those of us from outstate a voice in Madison, focused on: education, health care, the workforce, and you guessed it, technology. Next, also included in this session's budget was a package geared toward creating a digital 911 network and replacing the existing outdated analog 911 infrastructure throughout our state.

In addition, in the Assembly we've passed Telecommuter Forward legislation that facilitates municipalities' ability to market their communities as places where workers are able to telecommute. Municipalities can become certified for the program through the Public Service Commission – our state's regulatory agency responsible for the regulation of public utilities. Telecommuter Forward certification would include a single point of contact for municipalities to coordinate telecommuting opportunities, including:



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

- Coordination and partnership with telecommuting stakeholders
- Collaboration with broadband providers and employers to identify, develop, and market telecommuter-capable broadband packages, and
- Communication and partnership with broadband providers and economic development professionals to develop common goals

There is no incurred fiscal impact to the state for developing and promoting this certification. I co-sponsored the proposal and chose to hear the bill as chair of Rural Development and Mining Committee, and believe it should be a useful tool for communities to help attract individuals and promote an important aspect of their way of life.

Telecommuting has a real impact close to home too. I've spoken with several of folks at Fort McCoy who have told me how important telecommuting is for them and their spouses, in part because of the need to move around the country for their military service and duties.

There is more work to do on the horizon, but there are a number of tangible wins that have been achieved recently related to bringing technology home.

Nancy VanderMeer represents the 70th Wisconsin State Assembly District, which includes portions of Monroe, Jackson, Portage and Wood counties, and is the current chair of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Mining.