

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COLUMN: Federal Broadband Changes Harm Rural Americans**

“In 2021, Former President Biden signed \$42 billion into law for nation-wide broadband implementation and \$2.75 billion for digital literacy and cybersecurity training. These programs would help primarily rural areas connect to the digital age. Wisconsin received over \$1 Billion in BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment) allocations and over \$30 Million in DE (Digital Equity) grants. After years of methodical, state-led preparation and grant applications, shovels were set to dig into Wisconsin this summer.

“However, these programs could not survive one detail: their titles. They have fallen victim to the Equity massacre, despite the fact that “Equity” in this context is the inequity of internet connection between urban and rural areas.

“Last month, Trump’s administration canceled the DE program, including scam prevention trainings for seniors. Last week, they destroyed the BEAD program by reworking its eligibility requirements. Grants will now prioritize cheap (to build) satellite with no quality or licensure standards instead of less expensive (for consumers), more reliable, and more vetted Broadband providers. Despite their public feud, Elon Musk’s struggling Starlink will benefit tremendously.

“This is not the only way the BEAD program has been played for politics. Senator Ted Cruz has introduced a bill to withhold BEAD funding from any state that enforces AI regulation. AI is causing massive problems in so many fields: falsifying research, plagiarizing artists, generating illegal explicit content, enabling personalized scams targeting seniors. States need to regulate AI to protect our residents. Locking internet funding behind lowered internet security is insidious and cruel.

“The gutting of these programs shows how blind the current administration’s wrath is. They cut or redirected over \$40 billion that would help their own rural voters because they picked a fight with one word in the programs’ titles. More than that, the multi-billionaire Howard Lutnick who signed off this decision has failed to show basic understanding about the program he’s gutted – like RFK JR, who rattles off incoherent statistics with no basis in reality, or our new Commissioner of Social Security Frank Bisignano, who had to Google his own job description, Secretary Lutnick has failed in his new position.

“These people are incapable of helping Americans – rural, suburban, or urban – because they are incompetent within these roles. The only prerequisite to Trump’s Cabinet is wealth: he appointed or nominated 16 billionaires for an administration worth an unprecedented \$450 Billion, almost four-thousand times more than the Biden administration’s \$118 Million. This administration is the rich eating the poor. Even if they cared about the little guy, these billionaires are incapable of helping anyone.”

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*Representative Randy Udell represents the 47<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, which includes Fitchburg, Stoughton, and much of southcentral Dane County.*