



JAMES W. EDMING

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 87TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Investing in Rural Wisconsin

May 16, 2017

A little over two years ago, I began serving the people of the 87th Assembly District as their state representative. As I always tell folks, this job is the best job I have ever had. It is an honor to get up every day and go to work for the hardworking people of northern Wisconsin.

During my first term in the legislature, I began to notice that the needs and concerns of rural Wisconsinites were often being overlooked during policy discussions in Madison. I soon found out that I was not the only one noticing this. As I talked with other rural legislators I learned that they saw the same thing. These conversations led to the creation of the Rural Wisconsin Initiative (RWI), a group of rural legislators committed to making the voice of rural Wisconsin heard in Madison. The RWI is focused on bringing forward policy solutions to improve access to education, health care, technology, and workforce development in rural Wisconsin. I am proud to be a part of this effort.

One area where the RWI is already putting forward solutions is in improving access to technology. As I talk to people around the district, one of the main concerns I hear is the need for improved access to high-speed internet. I could not agree with my constituents more on this matter. The lack of high-speed internet access in rural Wisconsin is hurting economic growth, limiting educational opportunities, and reducing the quality of life for people in these areas. That is why earlier this year, I co-authored a proposal put forward by Representative Quinn of Rice Lake to increase investment in broadband internet expansion efforts in underserved areas.

This proposal, [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 123](#), would provide \$15.5 million in increased support for the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant Program in 2017. AB 123 would also increase funding by \$7.5 million for the Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) program which provides funding for teachers to learn about incorporating technology in their classroom. AB 123 was recently approved by the State Assembly with a unanimous 98-0 vote and now moves on to the State Senate where a similar bill has also been approved. I hope to see this important legislation become law soon.

Another area where the RWI is putting forward policy solutions is in the area of health care. Recently, I joined with several of my colleagues to put forward a package of bills that will help improve access to health care in rural Wisconsin. The bill I am authoring in this package, Assembly Bill (AB) 222, would invest funds to increase access to wellness facilities and



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programs in rural areas. Under AB 222, the Department of Health Services would receive \$500,000 to distribute as grants for the creation of rural wellness facilities and programs. By improving access to wellness programs and facilities in rural areas, our state will be taking an important step in improving overall health in rural Wisconsin. By keeping rural Wisconsinites healthier we can help lower healthcare costs and provide a more productive workforce. This, in turn, will help improve our economy.

Along with AB 222, there are three other bills in the RWI Health Care Package also aimed at improving access to health care in rural Wisconsin. These proposals are,

- [Assembly Bill 224](#) – relating to grants for education and training of allied health professionals. (Rep. Brooks, Reedsburg)
- [Assembly Bill 227](#) – relating to training grants for advanced practice clinicians. (Rep. Quinn, Rice Lake)
- [Assembly Bill 255](#) – relating to grants for quality improvement initiatives. (Rep. Zimmerman, River Falls)

In the weeks ahead I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in the legislature to advance proposals that strengthen rural Wisconsin.

For more information about the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, you can visit www.RuralWisconsinInitiative.com.

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