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STATE SENATOR

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TV “White Space” Offers Exciting Opportunity to Expand Broadband Access

According to the Wisconsin Broadband Office, nearly 14% of Wisconsin citizens lack access to broadband. Lack of access to broadband internet is a major challenge facing Wisconsin families, particularly those in rural areas.

The Wisconsin Legislature has made substantial investments in expanding broadband access. The last state budget allocated an additional \$10 million in broadband grants. Last year, the state awarded a \$117,000 grant to help build 7.5 miles of fiber along Highway O in Sheboygan County. Additional broadband grant applications for the area are pending.

However, more action is needed. A promising new technology has emerged to help bridge this gap. This new opportunity is referred to as broadband access via TV “white space.”

TV white space represents the annoying static between broadcast television stations on VHF or UHF dials. These dials have not been seen on most televisions for decades. Specifically, TV white space refers to the unused spectrum between TV stations. Today, this former minor inconvenience represents a new major opportunity.

By utilizing this unused spectrum, high speed internet can be made available to more communities than ever before. That’s because connecting users via TV white space technology is significantly more cost effective than either 4G wireless networks or fiber-optic cable.

High speed internet via TV white space operates four times faster and reaches sixteen times farther than Wi-Fi. The technology operates at a frequency that can move through objects like hills and trees. TV white space has already been successfully tested in 20 pilot efforts connecting 185,000 people.

In order for this product to be used on a commercial scale, the Federal Communications Commission must establish a permanent framework for this technology. This means the FCC should act to ensure the continued use of enough spectrum below 700 MHz on an unlicensed basis.

The state Legislature cannot force the FCC to act. However, last session I co-sponsored [Assembly Joint Resolution 100](#). This bipartisan initiative called on the FCC to establish a permanent TV white space framework that will help expand broadband access to more Americans.

There is no one easy solution to the challenge of expanding broadband access. However, if we do not act, rural areas of Wisconsin risk losing more young people as they depart for job opportunities elsewhere.

To solve the broadband access dilemma we must innovate beyond our existing fiber-optic and satellite technologies. TV white space presents an exciting new opportunity for Wisconsin families and communities. Next session, I will continue to advocate for the expansion of this promising technology.

Senator Devin LeMahieu (R-Oostburg) represents the 9th Senate District, which includes portions of Sheboygan, Manitowoc, and Calumet Counties. He is the Chair of the Senate Committee on Elections and Utilities.

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