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“Explain the importance of high speed broadband access to town economic and community development.”

Imagine trying to run a small business and you are unable to take customer orders or you are unable to communicate with clients due to slow internet speeds or no signal at all. This is reality for many rural small businesses as a result of slow, or even no internet service to support their business. To compete in today’s economy, small businesses and rural communities in Wisconsin need access to quality high speed internet. As technologies expand, reliable high speed broadband is essential to strengthening small businesses throughout Wisconsin’s rural communities.

I live in a rural area of southwest Wisconsin and our internet service is slim to none. My mother has served 16 years as the clerk for the Town of Seneca. She receives calls on a daily basis from community members and I see first-hand the difficulties of providing timely responses with our slow to non-existent internet access. Responses to requests for building permit applications, copies of town ordinances, and requests for absentee ballot applications via email is a more feasible option than the postal service however with our slow internet, this is not a possibility. One of the initiatives of the Seneca Town Board is recently adopting the Broadband Forward Community Model Ordinance ⁽¹⁾ in hopes to take steps to reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment. The board realizes the importance of reliable access to the internet as being vital to the economy and way of life.

Whether you are a student working on assignments, a job seeker training for a new career, a doctor reading a medical scan, an entrepreneur starting a small business, or a farmer trying to increase productivity, broadband access is important to the success of individuals and communities.

As a student of a small school with a high school enrollment of approximately 90 students (2), opportunities are limited for in-school advanced classes. I have taken advantage of several advanced placement courses offered online and have earned college credit while in high school. This would not be possible without access to high speed internet. There are also advantages for students and adults preparing to enter the workforce. Busy people can learn online at their own pace for less money than they would typically spend for an on-campus course. Distance learning allows adults to gain essential training to obtain employment, a college degree online, or complete an online training program.

In rural communities, the healthcare industry utilizes the internet to expand access to healthcare by using technology to transfer medical imaging instantly, which links patients to healthcare providers in larger cities for direct consultation. My mother also works at a maximum-security prison in rural Wisconsin. The prison utilizes telemedicine to connect with doctors at the UW Hospital in Madison to decrease transportation costs and bring quality healthcare without the security risks of leaving the prison gates.

My grandparents have farmed in rural Seneca for almost 30 years. They recently upgraded their farm operation and added robotic milkers. Each cow has an electronic identification number that lets the robotic milker know which cow is entering and if she is due for a milking. This information then translates the data to a hand-held device allowing my grandparents to monitor constantly and act at an early stage to provide attention to cows that

need it. With access to broadband, farmers are also able to gain immediate access to necessary information such as crop prices or weather forecasts. To be able to compete, rural American farmers need high-speed internet service to promote more efficient agriculture operations as the nature of farming is constantly changing. Not having access to broadband is costing farmers missed business opportunities.

In closing, high speed internet removes barriers allowing residents of rural areas to participate in life outside their neighborhood. Communications made possible by high speed internet allows businesses in remote areas to compete with larger cities. The numerous economic and social advantages enabled by the availability of high speed internet in rural areas benefits the entire country.

References

- (1) <https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/Programs/BroadbandForward.aspx>
- (2) www.dpi.wi.gov