

09hr_AC-EU_ab0696_pt03b



(FORM UPDATED: 08/11/2010)

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ... PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS

2009-10

(session year)

Assembly

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on Energy and Utilities...

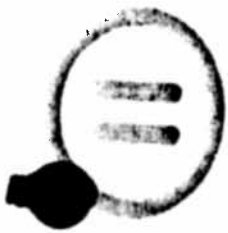
COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

- Committee Reports ... **CR**
- Executive Sessions ... **ES**
- Public Hearings ... **PH**

INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

- Appointments ... **Appt** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Clearinghouse Rules ... **CRule** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Hearing Records ... bills and resolutions (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
 - (**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution) (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
 - (**sb** = Senate Bill) (**sr** = Senate Resolution) (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**

* Contents organized for archiving by: Stefanie Rose (LRB) (December 2012)



Milwaukee Urban League

435 West North Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53212-3146
414-374-5850 414-562-8620 fax
www.tmul.org

Representative Jim Soletski
88th Assembly District
Room 307 West
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

February 17, 2010

Dear Chairman Soletski:

I am writing to express the Milwaukee Urban League's support for Senate Bill 469 / Assembly Bill 696. We encourage the Assembly Utility Committee to vote in favor of this legislation which we understand will achieve regulatory fairness for all Wisconsin telecommunications companies.

The Milwaukee Urban League provides training, education and workforce development opportunities for many of Milwaukee's low income, primarily African American, residents. Since 1919, we have been a long standing community pillar partnering with agencies and local businesses to provide social and economic opportunities for those in need. Our services are more in demand now, given today's struggling economy. Assisting the unemployed with finding jobs is much more difficult if the regulatory environment for business is unfriendly.

We believe businesses that provide investment, jobs and competitive services should not be burdened by out-dated, unfair regulatory laws. Combating unemployment requires a marketplace with modernized regulations that encourages companies to invest and create jobs. To that end, we hope the Assembly Utility Committee votes to pass SB 469 / AB 696. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Ralph Hollmon
President & CEO

Cc: State Representative Josh Zepnick, State Representative Jon Richards,
State Representative Anthony Staskunas, State Representative Ted Zigmunt
State Representative Joseph Parisi, State Representative John Steinbrink
State Representative Phil Montgomery, State Representative Mark Honadel
State Representative Kevin Petersen, State Representative Michael Huebsch
State Representative Rich Zipperer

New North, Inc.
1716 Lawrence Dr.
De Pere, WI 54115

February 9, 2010

Re: Matters related to SB 469

Dear Elected Official,

In today's global economy, technology, telecommunications services and high-speed internet access are essential elements for a thriving business environment. We support a regulatory climate in the state which allows the opportunity for greater infrastructure investments, job creation, and a more competitive marketplace for consumers.

Our orientation to a regional economic strategy includes efforts to develop industry clusters that are uniquely and favorably impacted by market competition for communications capacities/services. Current regulatory changes under review may well provide motivation for additional investment in technology and infrastructure in the region that will certainly help with the retention and creation of high-tech employment opportunities in Wisconsin.

New North encourages your review of infrastructure access and service matters that are important to supporting our strategic economic development efforts.

Sincerely,



Jerry Murphy
Executive Director, New North, Inc.



Waukesha County Chamber of Commerce

DRAFT

February 17, 2010

Senator Jeff Plale, Chairman
Senator Bob Wirch
Senator Pat Kreitlow
Senator Sheila Harsdort
Senator Jon Erpenbach
Senator Robert Cowles
Senator Neil Kedzie

Rep. James Soletski, Chairman
Rep. Josh Zepnick
Rep. Mark Honadel
Rep. Michael Huebsch
Rep. Phil Montgomery
Rep. Joe Parisi
Rep. Kevin Petersen
Rep. Jon Richards
Rep. Anthony Staskunas
Rep. John Steinbrink
Rep. Ted Zigmunt
Rep. Rich Zipperer

RE: SB-469/AB-696

Dear Senate and Assembly Utility Committee Members,

The Waukesha County Chamber of Commerce is a leading resource and advocate for businesses in Southeastern Wisconsin. Founded in 1918, the Waukesha County Chamber represents almost 900 member organizations and is devoted to improving and protecting the business climate in Waukesha County and the State of Wisconsin.

Now, more than ever, Wisconsin businesses need to be able to compete effectively across the globe. Telecommunications technologies are a key to making that happen.

Outdated rules that apply to some Wisconsin telecom companies stifle investment and innovation in our state's vital communications infrastructure. Senate Bill 469 and its companion, Assembly Bill 696, address this disparity and create a level playing field for all landline telecom service providers in Wisconsin. We encourage your support of these bills.

Telecom providers create local jobs and offer competitive services to many members of this Chamber and our community. Please support Wisconsin business owners, their employees, and the families that depend on them by voting in favor of this legislation.

Sincerely

Suzanne Kelley, President



February 10, 2010

Senator Jeff Plale, Chairman
Senator Bob Wirch
Senator Pat Kretlow
Senator Sheila Harsdorf
Senator Jon Erpenbach
Senator Robert Cowles
Senator Neal Kedzie

Representative James Soletski, Chairman
Representative Josh Zepnick, Vice-Chair
Representative Mark Honadel
Representative Michael Huebsch
Representative Phil Montgomery
Representative Joe Parisi
Representative Kevin Petersen
Representative Jon Richards
Representative Anthony Staskunas
Representative John Steinbrink
Representative Ted Zigmunt
Representative Rich Zipperer

Re: SB-469/AB-696

Dear Senate and Assembly Utility Committee Members,

Dear Senate and Assembly Utility Committee Members,

The Greater Brookfield Chamber of Commerce serves as an advocate for business at the local, state and federal level, with our goal to being to support policies – including SB 469 and AB-696 – that positively impact area businesses and customers. As you are well aware, the world of telecommunications and technology is changing by the minute. Businesses must keep up with the changes and innovation or they face the risk of losing market share and customers.

Competition and choice in the telecommunications industry will be a good thing for the Wisconsin consumer when service providers are regulated equally. This legislation takes a market driven, common sense business approach to regulating all providers of similar services and providing a level playing field to encourage a competitive market place.

As the President of a local chamber of commerce, I see first hand what competition and consumer choice does for small and medium size businesses, as well as for the consumer. Businesses become more efficient, innovative and service oriented. Traditionally when there is competition and more consumer choice, the customer benefits. That is the reason I am encouraging you and the members of the Wisconsin Legislature to support SB 469 and AB 696.

Sincerely,

Carole Ann Hildebrand
President

1305 NORTH BARKER ROAD, SUITE 3 • BROOKFIELD, WI 53045
2621 786-1886 • FAX: 2621 786-1959 • WWW.BROOKFIELDCHAMBER.COM

February 18, 2020

Senator Jeffrey Plale, Chair
Senate Utilities Committee
Room 313 South, State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator Plale:

On behalf of the Discovery Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, WI, I urge you to support Senate Bill 469/Assembly Bill 696: the "Wisconsin Access Reform and Parity Act."

UW-Stout's Discovery Center serves to advance UW-Stout's polytechnic focus through applied research with a commitment to quality and innovation, transformative education, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The Center integrates UW-Stout's applied research strengths, its faculty, staff and students, and its relationships with community and industry leaders to create collaborative partnerships. The Center provides leadership for innovation-based and knowledge-driven solutions for businesses, student learning, and economic development.

We support legislation that focuses on reducing unnecessary regulations, thereby removing obstacles for companies that create jobs, and on boosting our economy. Wisconsin's landline telephone providers are forced to operate under inconsistent and outdated rules from precompetition days in the telecommunications market. By supporting SB 469/AB 696 and similar legislation, you can help create an opportunity to increase service options and to eliminate restrictive, technologically obsolete regulations.

Wisconsin can lead the way to economic recovery for our nation if we can attract new business and help current businesses survive and thrive. We believe that the passage of SB 469/AB 696 is a positive step toward that goal.

Thank you for granting a public hearing for SB 469/AB 696 and for your attention to this need.

Sincerely,



Randy Hulke, Executive Director
The Discovery Center

RH/cjo

PARADIGM SENSORS

Feb. 22, 2010

Re: SB-469/AB-696

Dear ,

As a concerned citizen, taxpayer, and business owner in the State of Wisconsin, I look to the legislature to create a fair and equitable marketplace that will attract investment and innovation to our great state. It is important that we do everything we can to encourage a level playing field for companies to compete in Wisconsin, especially in an industry that is integral to every business in the state, telecommunications.

We would like your commitment to clean up an outdated telecom regulation in an already highly competitive marketplace, which is what Senate Bill 469/Assembly Bill 696 is designed to do. By updating the regulations covering telecommunication service providers, we can encourage competition and choice in the communications marketplace. Innovations and technological advances are occurring faster than anyone could have imagined only a few years ago and by supporting SB 469/AB 696, we can remove roadblocks that keep providers from investing in the networks. We need encourage that growth in our state and create a business environment that encourages investment and fair competition. Hence, the reason I ask for your support of this bill and asks you to vote in favor of SB-469/AB-696.

Sincerely,

Robert Young
President
Paradigm Sensors
414.462.8370



February 23, 2010

The Honorable Jeffrey Plale
Wisconsin State Senator
Room 313 South
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Plale,

I am writing to express the Wisconsin Business Council's support for SB-469 and AB-696. The WBC is Wisconsin's only non-partisan business group. One of the four principles that form the foundation of WBC's advocacy is regulation – more specifically the appropriate level of regulation. SB-469 and AB-696 strike the appropriate balance of regulation for the telecommunications industry given the rapid change in such a competitive marketplace.

These important bills would modernize the way Wisconsin regulates traditional telephone companies. The bill would regulate them under existing rules used effectively for many years for newer telephone providers, such as cable companies and others. The legislation would retain the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection's strong powers over the industry. As a result of this common sense approach, we believe Wisconsin's overall regulatory climate will not only be improved, but we will see more infrastructure investments, job retention and creation and competition than would otherwise take place.

There is no doubt that technology has how we do almost everything today, but especially the way we communicate with each other. The use of traditional landline phone service is declining rapidly as wireless and other alternative technologies become more readily available. To accommodate this changed marketplace, we must update our laws and regulations to ensure fair and robust competition. At the same time, it is important to retain necessary consumer protection. We believe that SB-469 and AB-696 strike such a reasonable balance between protecting consumers and encouraging competition and investment.

Perhaps the most important reason to modernize Wisconsin's telephone regulations is to free up resources for further investment in broadband technology. This is critical to job creation and Wisconsin's economic competitiveness. Wisconsin employers use broadband as part of their business model for numerous purposes. It has become a way of life for our businesses and an important component of Wisconsin's economic infrastructure, with thousands of jobs support or created annually because of broadband investment.

For these reasons, we strongly urge your support for SB-469 and AB-696.

Sincerely,

Brian Taffora
VP of Government Relations & Operations
Wisconsin Business Council

Feb. 9, 2010

State Sen./Rep. XXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

Re: SB-469 / AB-696

Dear Sen/Rep. XXXXXXX:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Technology Council, I write in support of SB-469 and AB-696. This bill would improve Wisconsin's telecommunications climate by requiring that all regulated landline providers are held to the same rules – all the while keeping appropriate consumer protections in place. From our board's perspective, a level playing field means more competition and more innovation, which is good for Wisconsin's tech-based economy.

Regulated landline telecom providers today operate under different regulatory structures. Traditional phone companies are regulated under rules that stem from an era when telecommunications was defined as two-way, voice-grade, analog wire-line service. In short, telecom was a plain black telephone on the wall. Newer providers have been regulated successfully under a more market-oriented structure that emphasizes competition. This newer structure has been successful and should be applied to all carriers.

Today, telecommunications is defined broadly to reflect a tidal wave of change in the age of digital computing and the Internet. The early 21st century meaning of telecommunications is the transmission and distribution of multiple forms of data – voice, text, video, music and more – through a variety of means. Seemingly overnight, the revolution in telecommunications has shattered rules that generations believed to be unwavering.

Rethinking regulatory barriers tied to the landline era are part of Wisconsin's overall effort to ensure that its telecom systems are world-class and that all regions of Wisconsin, from its major cities to its rural areas, have a chance to compete in the 21st century marketplace.

As you know, The Tech Council is the independent, non-profit and non-partisan science and technology advisers to the Governor and the Legislature. Its board of directors provides periodic "white papers" to policymakers on issues it believes are important to the development of Wisconsin's tech-based economy, as well as its research and development communities.

Since 2003, the Tech Council's white papers have consistently supported less regulation as a means for speeding technologies to market, providing more consumer choice, facilitating service

in rural and other under-served areas, and instilling more competition. While the markets are by no means perfect, they are far preferable to pre-emptive regulation that is often out of date from its effective date.

Here is what the Tech Council suggested to state policymakers in late 2006, when its white papers were published in advance of the 2007-2009 state budget debate.

“Wisconsin is still a state of small towns and rural communities. Some of these areas lack the critical mass of people, institutions and capital to easily attract high-tech businesses. But that does not mean they are bereft of assets. Rural communities and small cities can offer a quality of life that is attractive to many workers. They can supply highly motivated workers with a commitment to quality. They can offer lower business costs for land and construction. For rural Wisconsin to prosper in the Real-Time Economy, however, it must fully participate in the global communications revolution.

“To provide more certainty in regulatory issues affecting telecommunications companies doing business in Wisconsin, the state should seek tighter timelines on review periods by the state Public Service Commission. This could speed the introduction of new technologies and reduce the costs of providing such technologies. Such a change would be consistent with recent regulatory changes in the natural resources area. In addition, state laws governing broadband investment and the ‘unbundling’ of services should more closely mirror those in surrounding states as well as federal requirements. Significant departures from laws in other jurisdictions could slow the deployment of broadband, especially in rural areas. To expedite improved cell phone coverage in rural Wisconsin, the state should encourage local governments to streamline the approval process for installation of towers. The state should also enhance competition by striving for a more level playing field for different providers, such as cable companies and phone companies.”

In hindsight, the Tech Council’s own recommendations were not ambitious enough. Wisconsin’s ability to fully compete in the global economy increasingly rests on the ability of the state – from its major cities to its small communities – to have access to the latest telecom tools. Unfortunately, that is unlikely to happen in a regulated environment that ignores consumer adoption of new technologies that defy regulation in the traditional sense.

Wider broadband deployment, especially in Wisconsin’s rural areas, will be an important driver of economic growth and expanded consumer benefits. Local governments can best encourage broadband deployment by making rights of way available and keeping taxes, fees and regulation low. All levels of governments can best encourage broadband deployment by not trying to force it through regulation.

In its December 2007 white papers, the Tech Council said greater broadband access is important to rural Wisconsin for these reasons:

- It allows small businesses, which account for 60 percent of new jobs in Wisconsin, to expand their market and customer bases to the national and even international levels. Bear in mind that Wisconsin's export economy is growing faster than the U.S. average, and that a significant portion of that growth involves the export of high-tech goods and services. However, most of those goods and services originate in metro areas versus smaller communities.
- It creates more opportunities for creation of businesses related to information technology, one of the fastest-growing sectors in the U.S. economy. Wisconsin is 21st among the states in IT employment, but poised for growth if the right "highways" are opened to all parts of the state.
- It enables hospitals and clinics, such as the Marshfield Clinic, to better utilize telemedicine applications. An example might be rapidly locating digital medical records and medical images that can be easily transmitted to doctors or clinics in remote locations. Wisconsin is a hotbed of electronic medical record innovation, and we should capitalize on that.
- It provides rural Wisconsin residents with greater access to higher education through distance learning systems. Those systems themselves could become an export industry for Wisconsin, which could better leverage its K-12 educational system.
- It makes rural Wisconsin more likely to attract large data centers, which are part of many of today's virtually integrated businesses and corporations.

The United States ranked only 16th in the world in broadband penetration and Wisconsin is 25th among the states. That's not good enough. In fact, it is far short of the mark. Targeted modernization such as SB-469 / AB-696 will help ensure that Wisconsin's "digital divide" closes and that more opportunities become available to our citizens.

Thank you for considering our thoughts on this topic, and for your continuing bipartisan work on behalf of Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Tom Still, president

February 27, 2010

Senator Jeffrey Plale
Room 313 West State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

RE: Support for SB 469/AB 696

Dear Senator Plale:

Let me introduce myself. I am Bill Ihlenfeldt, Executive Director of Momentum West. Momentum West is a regional economic development marketing organization representing 10 counties in West Central Wisconsin including Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk, and St. Croix. We are one of seven such organizations in Wisconsin.

Telecommunications is vitally important to the economic future of our region and our state, and anything that can be done to cause investment in that industry is considered to be a crucial economic development asset. Telecommunications is especially critical in our region where entrepreneurial development makes up a major portion of our economy, and thus it becomes the lifeline for these small industries.

We feel that competition and a level playing field will allow advancements to happen and certainly SB 469/AB 696 will bring outdated laws up-to-date with today's new and emerging technologies. One set of rules for all providers will encourage more investment in research and development that can only help the consumer and encourage advancement in the industry.

While we encourage competition and advancement, it is also critical to keep in place and monitor expectations of all companies through identified metrics and deliverables.

Finally, we feel that advancements in this industry are just as critical as advancements in transportation and other economic development assets that our state has to offer.

We sincerely encourage you to support and pass SB 469/AB 696. If we can be of further assistance to you please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Bill Ihlenfeldt

February 27, 2010

Representative James Soletski
Room 307 West State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Support for SB 469/AB 696

Dear Representative Soletski:

Let me introduce myself. I am Bill Ihlenfeldt, Executive Director of Momentum West. Momentum West is a regional economic development marketing organization representing 10 counties in West Central Wisconsin including Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk, and St. Croix. We are one of seven such organizations in Wisconsin.

Telecommunications is vitally important to the economic future of our region and our state, and anything that can be done to cause investment in that industry is considered to be a crucial economic development asset. Telecommunications is especially critical in our region where entrepreneurial development makes up a major portion of our economy, and thus it becomes the lifeline for these small industries.

We feel that competition and a level playing field will allow advancements to happen and certainly SB 469/AB 696 will bring outdated laws up-to-date with today's new and emerging technologies. One set of rules for all providers will encourage more investment in research and development that can only help the consumer and encourage advancement in the industry.

While we encourage competition and advancement, it is also critical to keep in place and monitor expectations of all companies through identified metrics and deliverables.

Finally, we feel that advancements in this industry are just as critical as advancements in transportation and other economic development assets that our state has to offer.

We sincerely encourage you to support and pass SB 469/AB 696. If we can be of further assistance to you please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Bill Ihlenfeldt

CHIPPEWA FALLS

AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

March 8, 2010

Senator Jeff Plale, Chairman
Senator Robert Wirch
Senator Pat Kreitlow
Senator Sheila Harsdorf
Senator Jon Erpenbach
Senator Robert Cowles
Senator Neal Kedzie

Senate Utilities Committee:

The Chippewa Falls Area Chamber of Commerce leads in advocating for business in the area.

It is always good to have a "level playing field" for all businesses within the state of Wisconsin.

The regulations of the past encouraged competition while moving towards a level playing field.

There appears to be a discrepancy within the telecommunications area. Jane Doe cannot get a high speed internet service from her provider, but her neighbor can because she is served by a different company. This is due in part to the field not being equal for all companies.

I understand you will be considering a bill that will place all regulated landline carriers under the same set of regulatory rules. I believe this will be a benefit of your constituents and the businesses you serve.

Sincerely yours,



Michael Jordan
President

COPY

cc

WISCONSIN STATE GRANGE



March 3, 2010

Dear [LEGISLATOR NAME],

The Wisconsin State Grange, founded in 1872, is Wisconsin's oldest general farm and rural public interest organization. The Wisconsin State Grange represents farmers and rural residents across this state. Nationally, the Grange has been a non-partisan proponent of progressive legislation that will benefit U.S. agriculture and rural America for more than 140 years. One of the Wisconsin State Grange's top concerns is improving telecommunications services in rural Wisconsin. That is why the Wisconsin State Grange strongly urges you to support Senate Bill 469 and Assembly Bill 696.

The Wisconsin State Grange supports SB-469 / AB-696 because we believe this measure will encourage additional investment in broadband and other advanced telecommunications services in rural Wisconsin. Wisconsin Grange members are concerned that failure to modernize our laws will hinder additional, vital telecommunications investment in rural parts of our state. The bill would bring regulations governing many rural telecommunications providers into line with the levels of regulation their competitors face. At the same time, the bill retains the many important telecom consumer protections in place at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection. The Grange would much rather see rural telecommunications providers in Wisconsin invest in additional infrastructure and equipment, rather than spend their resources on complying with outdated regulations.

Access to advanced telecommunications infrastructure and services will be critical if farming and rural towns across Wisconsin are to remain economically competitive with our urban and suburban communities. Again, please support Senate Bill 469 and Assembly Bill 696. Thank you for your time and for your consideration of the views of the Wisconsin State Grange.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Keller

Richard Keller, Legislative Director
Wisconsin State Grange
1454 Keller Road
Mount Horeb, WI 53065



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Senator Jeff Plale (Chair)
Senator Robert Cowles
Senator Jon Erpenbach
Senator Sheila Harsdorf
Senator Neal Kedzie
Senator Pat Kreitlow
Senator Robert Wirch

Re: SB 469

March 22, 2010

Senate Utilities Committee:

I am writing as the President/CEO of the Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC), in support of this Senate bill which is under consideration.

This legislation will move us towards a system which reflects the changes in technology and business expectations. Private industry depends on deployment and investment in the communications infrastructure. Smart regulatory reform as put forth in Senate bill 469 will encourage the continued investment which is necessary in this global economy.

Standard regulation which applies uniformly to all players will level costs for these companies and that usually encourages greater competition among providers.

CCEDC requests your support in bringing regulation in line with current business conditions and encouraging continued investment in this important resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie Walker".

Charlie Walker
President/CEO

770 Scheidler Road, Suite 3 • Chippewa Falls, WI 54729
(715) 723-7150 • (800) 797-9976 • Fax: (715) 723-7140
e-mail: ccedc@chippewa-wi.com • www.chippewa-wi.com

P.O. Box 1660
Green Bay, WI 54305-1660

www.gbaw.com

April 2, 2010

Senator Robert Cowles
Wisconsin State Senate

RE: AB-696 / SB-469 Telecommunications Regulatory Parity

Dear Rob:

Like other states, Wisconsin needs to update and standardize its telecommunications regulation by passing the telecom regulatory parity bill.

This legislation will provide a uniform standard for all cable, landline and wireless telecommunications companies. In the current system, legacy or incumbent landline telecom companies are under state regulatory control whereas their competitors are regulated primarily by the federal government. This hampers competition in the wireless and cable markets—for example, restricting Wisconsin customers from receiving targeted rebates and promotions and more aggressive bundle pricing.

This legislation will also retain Wisconsin's strong consumer protection laws involving sales and billing practices, customer disclosures (including those related to price increases), prohibitions on negative option billing, state no-call lists, automatic contract renewal, use of robocalls, switching carriers, contract renewals, collections and fraud. It will also keep in place Public Service Commission requirements concerning privacy, contributions to the universal service fund, caps on late-payment charges, and jurisdiction over wholesale rates, interconnection requirements and transfer of customers.

We support this legislation because it will ensure that all service providers will compete under the same rules. This will encourage innovation and investment in Wisconsin by the legacy phone companies, and their competitors, thus improving job growth.

We respectfully urge you to move this bill through the legislature by the end of the current session so that Wisconsin residents can begin to benefit as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Paul F. Jadin
President

Dear Senator John Erpenbach,

Re: SB-469 & AB-696

I am writing to you today as a former at&t employee, a concerned Wisconsin resident/consumer and a member of Women In Focus, Inc. to express my support of SB469 and AB696.

Women in Focus is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to support the education of youth, particularly youth of color, in the Madison community through literacy programs and youth scholarships. It is because of strong community supporters like at&t that we have been able to provide over 190 college scholarships to deserving youth in the Madison Community.

The telecom industry has changed so much in the past 10 years and I applaud you for evaluating and looking to update the rules which govern this rapidly changing industry. The world of landline phones has quickly changed into one of cell phones, high speed internet connections, Wi-Fi and video with more to come. It is essential for the rules that have been in place for decades to be updated to reflect the generation in which we now exist. I believe it is important for you to implement laws which encourage the equal treatment of providers so that there is continued investment in the state of Wisconsin. By creating a single set of regulations, you are creating an environment in which the telecommunication providers are encouraged to invest, expand and innovate. That environment benefits not only the consumers of the state, but the students that my organization works hard to assist. We need to be able to provide them with innovative products and services so that they can grow to be strong, contributing citizens of our communities.

I believe this bill will help update the outdated telecom regulations that still exist. It is important to take smart steps toward making Wisconsin a competitive state that invests in its telecommunications infrastructure, its residents and its future. Please do that by supporting SB-469/AB696.

Sincerely,

Tina Murray
2721 Cordley Street
Fitchburg, WI 53711
608-277-9141

Brian Doudna
3929 Freedom Dr
Eau Claire, WI 54703

To: Senator Jeff Piale, Chairman
Senator Bob Wirch
Senator Sheila Harsdorf
Senator Robert Cowles

Senator Pat Kreitlow
Senator Jon Erpenbach
Senator Neal Kedzie

Representative Jim Soletski, Chairman
Representative Josh Zepnick
Representative John Steinbrink
Representative Phil Montgomery
Representative Jon Richards
Representative Mike Huebsch
Representative Rich Zipperer

Representative Anthony Staskunas
Representative Ted Zigmunt
Representative Kevin Petersen
Representative Joe Parisi
Representative Mark Honadel

February 17, 2010

Re: SB 469/AB696

Having worked in the field of economic development for the past 17 years, I am asking for your support of SB 469/AB696.

By implementing smart regulatory reforms, SB 469/AB696 will encourage much needed technological innovation and investment in Wisconsin. SB 469/AB696 will clean up and streamline the regulatory process and encourage investment in Wisconsin's infrastructure. It also will create a level playing field for new and traditional landline providers, establishing a single set of regulations that encourage greater competition.

During these trying economic times, Wisconsin businesses, families and workers are struggling to make ends meet. We owe it to them to do everything possible to enhance Wisconsin's ability to attract jobs to the state. Please vote in favor of regulatory clarity and support SB 469/AB696.

Sincerely,



Brian Doudna



Dear Legislator,

FreedomWorks, a national grassroots activist organization with over 9,900 Wisconsin members, is pleased to see Senate Bill 469 / Assembly Bill 696, pro-growth legislation that would end regulations that function like a tax, and modernize out-of-date, confusing and harmful state government telecom rules, progressing through the legislative process.

Technology has come a long way since Wisconsin's telecommunications laws were last updated. The current regulatory regime is badly outdated and reduces competition, investment, and innovation in telecommunications services. As a result, laws written for another time are putting the breaks on exciting new technologies and ultimately consumers are left with fewer choices and less innovative products.

This bill takes a deregulatory approach that would streamline and modernize existing law to encourage economic growth and robust competition. It strips out unnecessary and over-burdensome regulations in order to enable the free market to work and promote competition in the telecommunications industry. Especially in such turbulent economic times, Wisconsin consumers and the economy as a whole should reap the benefits of increased competition in the form of more choices, better service, and competitive prices.

SB-469/AB-696 will encourage competition and innovation. Consumers across Wisconsin will be the beneficiaries. We strongly urge you to continue to move SB-469 / AB-696 forward until it is enacted into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Kibbe".

Matt Kibbe
President, FreedomWorks
www.freedomworks.org



Tuesday, April 13, 2010

Dear Legislator:

This letter is in support of pending legislation to modernize Wisconsin's outdated telecom laws that we hope will be approved in Madison this month. Senate Bill 469/Assembly Bill 696 would help Wisconsin encourage investment, attract businesses and create jobs by simplifying the patchwork of laws affecting telecommunications.

The Northeast Wisconsin Regional Economic Partnership (NEWREP) is comprised of economic development professionals from sixteen northeast Wisconsin counties plus the Menominee Tribe. NEWREP provides hands-on support and programming for existing and prospective businesses. NEWREP members serve as the proverbial feet on the ground for economic development, providing local, personal services to area business communities. NEWREP's members have also elected to pursue in a collaborative manner initiatives dedicated to seeking solutions that will have a regional impact.

As a group representing sixteen counties, we recognize that the state needs to do everything it can to make Wisconsin competitive. That includes making it easy for our region to encourage the high-tech telecommunications infrastructure that today's existing and future businesses rely on.

Today, the state governs different types of providers in different ways – even though they all provide the same service. This makes real competition impossible and erects roadblocks to investment and competition.

The pending legislation, which has support from nearly 40 chambers and other organizations, realigns Wisconsin's laws with today's competitive world of broadband, wireless, cable and other technologies. It creates a level playing field based on current laws in place today. And it keeps in place consumer protections that have worked well, without any cost to taxpayers.

Passing SB-469/AB-696 will enhance our region's economic and business development environment and the quality of life for people living and working throughout the NEWREP territory.

We urge our area legislators to help win approval of this bill and help Northeast Wisconsin and the entire state become a magnet for the growing technology businesses and employers of the 21st Century.

Sincerely,

Sam Perlman
NEWREP President

MILWAUKEE • WISCONSIN

JOURNAL SENTINEL

Editorial: Revamping regulation

It's time to bring the state's telecommunications regulations up to date to better reflect the reality of competition in the phone market.

Published: April 13, 2010

Years ago, "telecommunications" meant a black, rotary dial phone connected to the wall with a wire. One company provided that service, and it made sense to treat that company as a regulated monopoly - because it was.

But that was then. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of connections rose 60% in Wisconsin, while the number of land lines fell 26%. Phone service now comes from a slew of wireless providers, Internet-based services and cable operators.

Problem is, the state's regulations don't reflect this reality. "Incumbent" phone companies, such as AT&T, are still regulated much like they were in the good, old days - back when they really were the only way to make a call. Cable and wireless companies enjoy a much lighter touch from the government.

A bill that has passed committees in both houses of the Legislature would even out the regulatory climate - mostly for the better. We support the legislation with a few caveats.

Senate Bill 469 would strip the state Public Service Commission of much of its oversight of incumbent companies. The state Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection would become the primary consumer watchdog. The bill is sponsored by state Sen. Jeff Plale (D-

South Milwaukee) and state Rep. Josh Zepnick (D-Milwaukee).

Loosening the harness on companies such as AT&T is a sensible and overdue way to increase competition and encourage more investment in the state's telecommunications infrastructure. We believe consumers will be well-protected by DATCP, which already handles hundreds of phone complaints a year. (Complaints to both DATCP and the PSC have been declining, by the way, which we take to be a sign that the relentless competition is having an effect: Customers know they have options - and so do companies providing the service.)

But legislators should strengthen the bill by insisting that the PSC retain its ability to prevent a company from eliminating service in areas of the state that don't have other viable service options. The agency also should have a role in resolving service complaints, where it has years of technical expertise. And we'd also like to see a mandatory reassessment of the legislation in three to five years to see if the changes helped consumers.

Other states are making similar regulatory adjustments; Wisconsin should not be left behind. Land-line companies, such as AT&T, should be freed of rules that made sense in the 1950s but put them at a competitive disadvantage in 2010. But the Legislature also must be assured that consumers are protected.

Editorial

Telecomm rules need overhaul

THE ISSUE: A bill pending in the state Legislature that would put all landline providers under one set of rules

OUR STANCE: Lawmakers should pass the bill as it could help the state recruit technology firms, such as Google.

Milwaukee, like many other cities, has put on the full-court press to convince Google to choose it as a test site for its “ultra high-speed” fiber network.

But Wisconsin has one major drawback – outdated telecommunications regulations, which could be seen by the Internet giant as a drawback to choosing any community in Wisconsin for the sought-after network. Google plans to choose cities to lay new fiber lines and provide Internet service that the company says would reach more than 1 gigabit per second, 100 times faster than standard Internet access.

Google solicited applications from interested communities in February. More than 1,100 communities responded by the March 26 deadline.

Proponents of the bid say Wisconsin has improved its telecommunications regulations in recent years, but still lags other states in welcoming technology firms to invest in infrastructure and create much-needed jobs.

A bill pushed by state Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee) is pending in the state Legislature and would help improve Wisconsin’s telecommunication regulations and its effort to attract Google. It would place traditional landline providers, such as AT&T, under the same set of rules that govern providers of newer technologies. An overhaul of the regulations would help foster competition, which is good for business customers, and encourage infrastructure development and job creation.

The proposal has been backed in recent weeks by Senate and Assembly committees. It should be passed by the full state Legislature before it adjourns at the end of the month. As the national and local economies continue the slow recovery from the downturn, any advantage the state can have to increase economic development must be pursued.

EDITORIAL

EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED, THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED ON THIS PAGE ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE MILWAUKEE COURIER

Modernizing outdated telecom laws will create opportunity in minority communities

At a time when jobs are scarce, healthcare costs are soaring out of control and access to a quality education depends on which side of the tracks you live on, there is no more important time for our communities to rally around legislation that creates a tremendous opportunity for our people. That legislation is Senate Bill 469 and its companion legislation, Assembly Bill 696 -- the Wisconsin Telecom Modernization Act.

This important legislation will remove outdated rules that are stifling the growth of technology in the Badger state. Without this necessary change, Wisconsin communities will be left behind with less infrastructure investment, less job creation, less competition for consumers and most importantly, less access to state-of-the-art broadband technology. If this happens, the state of Wisconsin will stagnate, and as you know,

whenever the general population suffers, the suffering is exponential in low income and minority communities where the negative impact will be felt to a much greater extent. On the other hand, legislation that stimulates broadband investment creates unlimited potential for our communities. It can allow underserved neighborhoods to promote economic development through the establishment of minority small busi-

nesses that hire locally. It can provide Wisconsin citizens with better access to health-care and get expert medical advice from the top healthcare facilities in the country. It can create opportunities for education by giving children the ability to have a world of information at their fingertips and it can empower people to search for jobs that they never knew existed. Furthermore, it can give the voiceless a voice in the political process so that

real people can have an impact on issues that affect their everyday lives. With the future of the state of Wisconsin at a crossroads, we must encourage our state legislators to decide which course of action would be best for our communities. We can continue on a path that will take decades for minority communities to see real progress or we can jump start the process to bring real, meaningful change to our neighbor-

hoods by passing legislation that will stimulate the growth of broadband in our state. Therefore, for the sake of our future, and the future of our children, it is critical that the state of Wisconsin pass Senate Bill 469/Assembly bill 696 into law. Reverend Terrence Sims, President, Wisconsin Chapter Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide
414-406-8338

Modernizing outdated telecom laws will create opportunity in minority communities

By Rev. Terrance Sims

President, Wis. Chapter--Ministerial Alliance
Against the Digital Divide

At a time when jobs are scarce, healthcare costs are soaring out of control and access to a quality education depends on which side of the tracks you live on, there is no more important time for our communities to rally around legislation that creates a tremendous opportunity for our people. That legislation is Senate Bill 469 and its companion legislation, Assembly Bill 696 -- the Wisconsin Telecom Modernization Act.

This important legislation will remove outdated rules that are stifling the growth of technology in the Badger state.

Without this necessary change, Wisconsin communities will be left behind with less infrastructure investment, less job creation, less competition for consumers and most importantly, less access to state-of-the-art broadband technology.

If this happens, the state of Wisconsin will stagnate, and as you know, whenever the general population suffers, the suffering is exponential in low income and minority communities where the negative impact will be felt to a much greater extent.

On the other hand, legislation that stimulates broadband investment cre-

ates unlimited potential for our communities. It can allow underserved neighborhoods to promote economic development through the establishment of minority small businesses that hire locally.

It can provide Wisconsin citizens with better access to healthcare and get expert medical advice from the top healthcare facilities in the country. It can create opportunities for education by giving children the ability to have a world of information at their fingertips and it can empower people to search for jobs that they never knew existed.

Furthermore, it can give the voiceless a voice in the political process so that real people can have an impact on issues that affect their everyday lives.

With the future of the state of Wisconsin at a crossroads, we must encourage our state legislators to decide which course of action would be best for our communities.

We can continue on a path that will take decades for minority communities to see real progress or we can jump start the process to bring real, meaningful change to our neighborhoods by passing legislation that will stimulate the growth of broadband in our state.

Therefore, for the sake of our future, and the future of our children, it is critical that the state of Wisconsin pass Senate Bill 469/Assembly bill 696 into law.

LaCrosseTribune.com

Opinion:

Wisconsin economy and jobs will benefit from telecom modernization bill

By Brian T. Doudna and Scott T. VanderSanden
Posted: Thursday, April 8, 2010

Investments in the latest technologies are critical to a state's ability to compete on a national and global scale. To attract these high-tech investments and related jobs, an up-to-date telecommunications infrastructure is needed - including fast and widely available broadband.

Unlike other nearby states such as Indiana, Wisconsin has not advanced all the necessary initiatives to attract these desired investments and jobs. Old, out-of-date state telecom rules continue to discourage telecom investments. The last time telecom laws were changed in Wisconsin was in 1994. In the subsequent 16 years, there have been tremendous changes in technology, but our Wisconsin's regulations are still tied to an old industry model.

Fortunately, one major step is being considered that, if taken in the next few weeks, could bring Wisconsin into the 21st Century and make our state more competitive. The Wisconsin Legislature is considering legislation, Senate Bill 469 / Assembly Bill 696, that would modernize a regulatory structure that goes back to the days of no telecom choices except for one phone company and a black rotary phone. As we all know, that era is gone forever, replaced by rampant competition between carriers and technologies - phone company landlines, cable telephony, wireless, voice over Internet protocol. Consumers have never had so many choices. And these choices have put consumers squarely in the driver's seat.

But in Wisconsin, investment, competition and employment face barriers from an antiquated set of regulations that apply differently to different services and to different providers. Investments and job growth that could and should happen in Wisconsin occur instead in states that have removed outdated regulations. Instead of an information superhighway, we're saddled with a bureaucratic maze.

SB-469 / AB-696 applies a simple solution to this problem. It sets regulation at the same level for all providers in the

marketplace, allowing all providers to compete on an equal footing. And the bill retains the strong Wisconsin consumer protections already in place. These already deal very effectively with fraudulent sales and billing practices, customer disclosures, prohibitions on negative option billing, no-call lists, automatic contract renewals, use of robocalls, switching carriers and contract renewals. Also remaining under the bill will be required contributions to the universal service fund, caps on late-payment charges and jurisdiction over wholesale relations. And by creating a level playing field, all customers could receive targeted rebates and promotions and more aggressive bundle pricing, which is not the case today.

Vibrant telecom competition in Wisconsin warrants a level playing field for all landline providers. Most consumers can choose among multiple landline providers, including a cable company. They almost all have wireless service available, too. And many people have switched to Internet calling, using services like Vonage and Skype. The options continue to grow, and consumers continue to take advantage of them. The number of Wisconsin consumers today getting service from the more heavily regulated traditional phone companies continues to drastically shrink. More than 4.7 million or 67% of Wisconsin lines are served today by providers who face less regulation than traditional landline companies. And these millions of customers of the newer companies haven't been harmed by this different level of regulation, and in fact are benefiting from the new choices.

SB-469 / AB-696 is an idea whose time has come. That's why it's been endorsed by more than 30 Wisconsin technology, business and non-profit groups. That's why the Assembly Utilities Committee recently approved the bill unanimously, 12-0, following overwhelming support in the Senate Utilities Committee. If this legislation passes, all Wisconsin residents will benefit from an improved climate for tech investment and job growth, a continuation of our strong consumer protections and more benefits of telecom competition.

April 8, 2010

TELECOM BILL

Level the playing field

In response to the Sunday Crossroads op-ed by Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee) regarding the need to reform Wisconsin's telecom laws, we couldn't agree more. As one of the organizations that supports the passage of Senate Bill 469 and Assembly Bill 696, it becomes increasingly clear that Wisconsin needs to do what it can to encourage investment by the telecom industry, as it is that same network which serves as the backbone to how business is done in the 21st century.

Times have changed for area businesses, and the ability to be responsive and connected to their customers is the key to winning in the marketplace. If we want the businesses that rely on the telecommunications network to be able to grow in this tough economic environment, we need to reduce the regulatory redundancy and level the playing field.

Carol White

President
Greater Brookfield
Chamber of Commerce
Brookfield

April 5, 2010

PHONES

Time to change regulatory structure

Jim Stingl's column about society's shift away from landline telephones is a great example of why telecommunication regulatory modernization legislation currently pending in Madison should pass (March 28, Page 1B).

The legislation (SB 469 / AB 696) recognizes the same shift Stingl has observed by placing all landline providers under a single set of rules rather than forcing providers to operate under an outdated and costly patchwork of differing regulation. Most important, however, by reducing the regulatory cost on the shrinking landline market, the bill will free up additional resources for companies to invest in the wireless marketplace and other emerging telecommunications technologies.

As Stingl observes, times change. Perhaps in no area is that change occurring more rapidly than in information technology and telecommunications. It's time for Wisconsin's law to change as well to facilitate a regional economy that can grow at the speed of the marketplace rather than one that is hobbled by a regulatory system as outdated as landline phones themselves are fast becoming.

Steve Baas

Director of Government Affairs
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
Milwaukee

April 12, 2010

TELECOMMUNICATIONS BILL

A common-sense approach

I read with interest op-eds in the Journal Sentinel from [state Sen. Jeff Plale](#) and [Professor Barry Orton](#) concerning Senate Bill 469. From Plale's perspective, it would update current laws for telecom service providers and encourage investment and jobs, and from Mr. Orton's viewpoint, it would harm consumers (Crossroads, April 4).

As I look to my cell phone to make calls, send text messages, e-mails and search the Internet, I realize the marketplace for services is filled with choices for consumers. Consumers can also let go of their landlines. This is an option I personally will not exercise. But if the marketplace has choices, how can more regulation on companies as proposed by Orton help?

Given the current economic conditions, it makes sense to propose regulations that fairly govern all providers the same. Revising telecom laws that do not overburden companies will help the state keep investments, jobs, technology and competition moving in the interest of consumers and the state.

David Anderson
Brown Deer

February 17, 2010

Opinion

Modern telecom rules needed for growth

By Thad Nation

Wisconsin is stuck in a bit of a time warp - at least from a regulatory standpoint.

As it stands, telecommunications providers in Wisconsin are regulated in different ways. Traditional landline providers are governed under one set of rules, while providers of more modern options - such as wireless, cable and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) - are governed under a different set of rules. This is a holdover from the days of telephone monopolies, when regulations were necessary to make sure companies charged fair rates, provided a high quality of service and built out their service to rural areas to serve all consumers.

But today, consumers enjoy a far greater degree of choice in the telecom industry, electing more and more to use newer technologies rather than traditional landlines. Rural areas are connected, and consumer demands are driving technological advances at a phenomenal pace. The regulations that were put in place for "Ma Bell" are not only unnecessary; they're now holding Wisconsin back.

Businesses that are subject to these archaic landline rules are not as free to improve their businesses in the state, which means less infrastructure investment, less job creation, less broadband access and less competition between providers.

But new legislation - Senate Bill 469 / Assembly Bill 696 - sponsored by Sen. Jeff Plale and Rep. Josh Zepnick would change all that.

Under the new set of proposed rules, traditional landline providers would be subject to the same set of rules that govern providers of newer technologies. This would free traditional phone companies from the barriers to competition and expansion under the current system and allow them to properly compete in the marketplace.

As a result, landline providers would have an added incentive to expand their services and build new infrastructure, which would mean more jobs and more economic growth for Wisconsin and better services for consumers.

This bill also manages to change the regulatory system while ensuring that vital consumer protections are still in place. All of the current consumer protection rules through DATCP would remain under the new system, which means consumers would enjoy proper oversight over things such as billing, sales, consumer fraud and collections. The attorney general and DATCP also would continue to have the ability to investigate and act on consumer complaints.

But perhaps most important, the ultimate consumer protection is that a truly competitive marketplace would allow consumers to freely choose their phone and Internet providers, without the regulatory barriers that have been holding landline providers back. That competition would help keep prices in check while ensuring consumers receive a high level of service.

Wisconsin is still regulating the telecom industry as though it's the 20th century. What we need now is a 21st-century system that takes into account changes in consumer behavior and technology and allows all telecom providers to compete on the same level.

The telecom modernization bill is in the best interest of consumers, businesses and Wisconsin as a whole, and it's exactly what our state needs to continue moving forward.

Thad Nation is executive director of Wired Wisconsin (www.wiredwisconsin.org), the Wisconsin-based project of Midwest Consumers for Choice and Competition, a nonprofit organization of individual consumers interested in technology, broadband and telecommunication issues with state projects throughout the Midwest.

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) was among several Wisconsin business and technology groups applauding the advancement of the Telecommunication Modernization Bill in the state Legislature.

The MMAC praised a 12-0 vote Tuesday by the Assembly Utilities Committee and a 6-1 vote by the Senate Utilities Committee last week in favor of Senate Bill 469/Assembly Bill 696.

The bill would modernize existing telecom regulations by placing all landline providers under a single set of rules. The groups said the votes would help preserve and create jobs and improve technology infrastructure across the state.

Steve Baas, government affairs director for the MMAC, said the votes show that, "legislators don't want Wisconsin to fall behind other states already welcoming technology investments. Passage of this legislation will send a needed signal that Wisconsin wants to attract tech businesses, jobs and investment at a time when the national and state economies are in a downturn."

"Legislators realize that Wisconsin's out-of-date telecommunications rules need to be modernized to encourage investment in Wisconsin's broadband and telecommunication infrastructure and create and retain jobs," said Tom Still, president of the nonprofit Wisconsin Technology Council.

Thad Nation, executive director of the nonprofit Wired Wisconsin, said the votes would "help promote increased access to new technologies, foster a more competitive market and encourage infrastructure development and job creation."

- *BizTimes Milwaukee* - April 13, 2010

April 5, 2010

Opinion

Regulation to keep pace with new technology

By Jeff Plale

In the past three decades, the telecommunications landscape in Wisconsin has shifted dramatically, but the laws regulating the industry have not.

In 1994, the last time the state upgraded the telecommunications statutes, every customer was served by a local provider who built the telecommunications network in their community. Competitive landline providers didn't exist. Cable television was relatively new, and the idea that cable companies also could provide us with phone service was unheard of. Wireless phones weren't even on our collective radar screen.

In 1994, my "car phone" came in a nylon bag.

Today, there are cable phone providers and competitive landline carriers, and nearly everyone has a cell phone. In fact, as columnist [Jim Stingl wrote recently](#) in the Journal Sentinel, many households are scrapping their landlines and now entirely rely on cell phones for communication.

Because of this dramatic shift in lifestyle, the traditional landline companies that once held 100% of the market share in their service territory now serve less than 50% of that same territory in many cases. Local phone companies that once dominated the market are undergoing a difficult transition. Customers, however, are reaping the benefits through more options, better customer service and increased value.

The traditional incumbent landline companies have adapted and evolved to survive in today's marketplace. As they make these necessary changes, they continue to bump up against state statutes that treat them as though it is still 1935 and that new competitive landline companies do not exist.

Incumbent landline companies that were here when the statutes were updated in 1994 are now competing with new companies that have come to Wisconsin and, using new technology, operate under a different set of regulations. Cable companies, in particular, have taken great advantage of providing telephone service through the cable already in place for their television customers. They are not subject to the same regulations as the traditional incumbent landline companies, and, therefore, the playing field is uneven.

[Senate Bill 469](#) will apply the same set of rules to all of the landline companies providing service in Wisconsin's telecommunications industry. Competitive landline, alternative landline providers and cable phone companies have been governed by a standard set of rules and regulations for years. SB 469 applies this set of more recent, streamlined and proven rules and regulations to all landline carriers equally.

SB 469 also ensures that all customers are protected evenly, regardless of which phone company they use. By eliminating redundancies and reinforcing existing Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection statutes and rules, this bill guarantees that DATCP will have the jurisdiction and

authority to respond to the questions, needs and complaints of all telephone consumers in the state, not just those served by competitive providers.

New technology is developing every day, and legislation acknowledging and implementing these advances has been slow to catch up. Ensuring that Wisconsin's telecommunication statutes are up to date is necessary so that new businesses and providers see our state as a friendly place to set up shop.

Advancements in the telecommunications industry are setting the stage for the new face of economic development. The expansion of the railroad brought jobs and business to new communities. Leveling the playing field for telecommunications in Wisconsin is akin to laying new track for railroads.

Business follows where infrastructure is implemented, and jobs will come along with that new business. Wisconsin should be poised to be a leader in the new economy. SB 469 encourages investment in our technological infrastructure. Most important, it provides more options for consumers and offers better protections to those consumers.

State Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee) represents Wisconsin's 7th Senate District and is a chief sponsor of SB 469.

THE Business Journal SERVING GREATER MILWAUKEE

Friday, March 19, 2010

LETTERS

Is Wisconsin ready for high-speed experiment?

The Business Journal of Milwaukee

In mid-February, the Internet search engine company Google announced its plan to build out a high-speed Internet network in one or more communities in the United States, and already Madison and Milwaukee are trying to get Google's attention to be the chosen city.

Interested communities can nominate themselves to be the testing site for Google's "Think Big with a Gig" experiment. Although this experiment could potentially benefit up to 500,000 consumers, there are many questions about Google's experiment. Perhaps Google may want to use its own search engine to review Wisconsin's outdated, complicated and burdensome regulations on the telecommunications industry.

My record indicates that I am a strong supporter of telecommunication provider competition and I also recognize that Google's experiment could be beneficial to communication consumers in Wisconsin, but what exactly is Google promising to do in its chosen community?

Madison and Milwaukee already have multiple high-speed Internet providers, who are recognized through the state Public Service Commission and subject to outdated regulations. These providers have also invested hundreds of millions of dollars into Wisconsin's communications infrastructure. Each provider has to conform to rules and regulations set forth by the PSC. If Google chooses to come to Wisconsin, would it too have to follow Wisconsin's outdated, complicated, unfair and burdensome regulations?

Legislators have worked toward regulatory parity this legislative session by authoring Senate Bill 469. The intention of this legislation is to level the regulatory playing field so that all providers could compete for customers in Wisconsin. If Wisconsin is going to move forward with advancements in Internet technologies, we must update and improve our state's telecommunication regulations.

State Rep. Phil Montgomery, (R-Green Bay)



Council of Small Business Executives

www.mmac.org

Top State Tech, Business and Non-Profit Groups Praise Unanimous Vote, 12-0, by Assembly Utilities Committee for Telecommunication Modernization Bill

Members of coalition of 31 groups supporting the bill also praise last week's Senate Utilities Committee vote, 6-1, in favor of bill

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 30, 2010

CONTACT: STEVE BAAS

414-287-4138

MADISON...Members of top Wisconsin technology, business and non-profit groups praised the 12-0 unanimous vote Tuesday by the Assembly Utilities Committee and the 6-1 vote by the Senate Utilities Committee last week in favor of Senate Bill 469 / Assembly Bill 696.

The groups said the votes would help preserve and create jobs and improve technology infrastructure across the state.

Thirty one groups have announced their support of the bill. The groups include economic development associations, local and regional business groups and non-profits representing diverse groups of state residents.

"Legislators realize that Wisconsin's out-of-date telecommunications rules need to be modernized to encourage investment in Wisconsin's broadband and telecommunication infrastructure and create and retain jobs," said Tom Still, president of the non-profit Wisconsin Technology Council.

Thad Nation, executive director of the non-profit Wired Wisconsin, said the votes would "help promote increased access to new technologies, foster a more competitive market and encourage infrastructure development and job creation. Representatives Josh Zepnick and Jim Soletski deserve credit on behalf of Wisconsin workers for their strong leadership on this bill."

Steve Baas, government affairs director for the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, said that the votes show that, "legislators don't want Wisconsin to fall behind other states already welcoming technology investments. Passage of this legislation will send a needed signal that Wisconsin wants to attract tech businesses, jobs and investment at a time when the national and state economies are in a downturn." Support for the bill by many of the committee members, such as Rep. Phil Montgomery, follows their long commitment to improving the state's tech infrastructure, Baas said.

SB-469 / AB-696 would modernize existing telecom regulations by placing all landline providers under a single set of rules – rules that have been successfully regulating part of the industry for years. The state's tough consumer protection laws would continue to apply to all providers, under the bill.

The 31 organizations in favor of the bill include:

- Avenues West Association
- Chippewa Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Discovery Center - UW Stout
- Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce
- Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- Friends of Housing Corporation
- Greater Brookfield Chamber of Commerce
- Hispanic Business and Professionals Association
- Hmong/American Friendship Association
- Independent Business Association of Wisconsin
- Kenosha Area Chamber of Commerce
- Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce Chamber
- Milwaukee Community Service Corps
- Milwaukee Urban League
- Momentum West
- Mueller Communications, Inc.
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Milwaukee Branch
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Racine County
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Waukesha Co. Branch
- New North, Inc.
- Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
- Paradigm Sensors
- Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce (RAMAC)
- United Community Center
- Urban Economic Development Association of Wisconsin
- Valley Home Builders Association
- Waukesha County Chamber of Commerce
- Wired Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Business Council
- Wisconsin Supplier Diversity Council
- Wisconsin Technology Council

###



In a changing world, Wisconsin's telecom policies need to keep pace

March 8, 2010

By Tom Still

MADISON – An arm of the United Nations recently predicted that 2010 will be the year when the world hits 5 billion cell phone users and 1 billion mobile broadband subscribers.

Think about that for a second. That's almost as many cell phone users as there are people on the face of the planet.

It's a remarkable commentary on the revolution in telecommunications that has swept across the world. From Singapore to the Serengeti, people are using mobile, wireless devices to access the internet for reasons that range from the personal to the professional.

An image that sticks in my mind is seeing people in northern Tanzania, in areas where you're more likely to spot African wildlife than a telephone pole, using their cell phones. Expensive land-line technologies had been leapfrogged there, even during my visit four years ago, in favor of more accessible wireless access.

Wouldn't it be great if public policies in Wisconsin caught up with those in the developing world?

That question is only half in jest. A good deal of telecommunications policy in Wisconsin seems trapped in a time when "telecom" meant a plain black analog telephone hanging on the wall.

Today, telecommunications is defined broadly to reflect a tidal wave of change in the age of digital computing and the Internet. The early 21st century meaning of telecommunications is the transmission and distribution of multiple forms of data – voice, text, video, music and more – through a variety of means. Seemingly overnight, the revolution in telecommunications has shattered rules that generations believed to be unwavering.

Rethinking regulatory barriers tied to the landline era are part of Wisconsin's overall effort to ensure that its telecom systems are world-class and that all regions of Wisconsin, from its major cities to its rural areas, have a chance to compete in the 21st century marketplace.

While Wisconsin is getting more aggressive about deploying broadband networks and using federal stimulus dollars to do so, the law and the regulatory culture haven't kept up. In fact, efforts to nudge Wisconsin's regulatory structure closer to the times sometimes come across as

painfully slow.

At a recent legislative hearing on two bills (SB-469 and AB-696) that would streamline some regulations, lawmakers were told that one telecom rules change has been under review by the state Public Service Commission for 10 years. That's a lifetime in telecom innovation.

That snail-like pace is often defended in terms of protecting consumers. But consumers aren't protected when someone in Tanzania can do their banking over the Internet miles from the nearest town and someone in rural Wisconsin can't access high-speed internet.

Part of protecting consumers is making sure they have access to the latest technology – technology that can improve their businesses and their quality of life. Greater broadband access and cell-phone service is important to rural Wisconsin for many reasons:

- * It allows small businesses, which account for 60 percent of new jobs in Wisconsin, to expand their markets and customer bases to the national and even international levels.
- * It creates more opportunities for creation of businesses related to information technology, one of the fastest-growing sectors in the U.S. economy. Wisconsin is 21st among the states in IT employment, but poised for growth if the right "highways" are opened to all parts of the state.
- * It enables hospitals and clinics to better utilize telemedicine applications. An example might be rapidly locating digital medical records and medical images that can be easily transmitted to doctors or clinics in remote locations. Wisconsin is a hotbed of electronic medical record innovation, and it should capitalize on that.
- * It provides rural Wisconsin residents with greater access to higher education through distance learning systems. Those systems themselves could become an export industry for Wisconsin, which could better leverage its K-12 educational system.
- * It makes rural Wisconsin more likely to attract large data centers, which are part of many of today's virtually integrated businesses and corporations.

Within five years, the United Nations predicts, Internet access by people on the move – such as laptop computers and "smart" mobile devices – will exceed web access from desktop computers.

For Wisconsin to compete in that changing world, its laws and regulations need to move beyond a 20th century land-line mentality. Five billion cell phone users can't all be wrong.

Still is president of the Wisconsin Technology Council. He is the former associate editor of the Wisconsin State Journal in Madison.

###

THE Business Journal

SERVING GREATER MILWAUKEE

Friday, April 2, 2010

The battle for Google: City makes bid to land sought-after fiber network

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - by [Stacy Vogel Davis](#)



Provided by Clear Channel Outdoor - Milwaukee

This billboard was posted at the corner of Interstate 94 and 25th Street in Milwaukee for 14 days.

Despite competition from more than 1,000 communities and vague criteria from **Google**, Milwaukee technology executives believe the city stands a good chance to become a test site for the "ultra high-speed" Google Fiber Network.

"I would definitely think that we have a great chance at it," said Pat Doran, a Greendale resident, who started the Facebook site "Google Fiber for Milwaukee."

Nearly 1,300 Facebook fans agree, as does Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.

"We've got a roll-up-our-sleeves-and-get-it-done attitude, and I think that's appealing," Barrett said.

That seems as good an argument as any, given the lack of specifics Google has released for its process of choosing one or more test communities for its experimental fiber network. Google Fiber is supposed to reach speeds of 1 gigabyte-per-second, more than 100 times faster than what most Americans have today.

Google solicited applications from interested communities in February. More than 1,100 communities responded by the March 26 deadline, including Milwaukee, Madison, Appleton, Green Bay, Marshfield, Superior and Pleasant Prairie.

Google has said it wants to offer the test service "at a competitive price" to 50,000 to 500,000 people, according to its Web site.

With little to go on, many communities launched stunts to draw Google's attention, from renaming their cities Google to declaring an official Google Day. Appleton renamed one of its main thoroughfares "Google Avenue," while Madison held a public rally. Madison companies renamed an ice cream flavor and pizza in honor of Google, and nearly 5,000 people joined a "Bring Google Fiber to Madison" Facebook site.

In Milwaukee, Clear Channel Outdoor donated space on 14 digital billboards for two weeks encouraging residents to “tell Google to hook us up.” In a recent interview, Barrett joked he was parachuting into the city to get Google’s attention.

But Milwaukee has plenty of attributes to attract Google without resorting to jumping out of planes, Barrett and others said.

The city is unique in its amount of underground fiber, which would allow Google to install its network without digging up as many streets, said Thad Nation, executive director of the Milwaukee-based tech advocacy group **Wired Wisconsin**.

“Just from a practical standpoint, that’s a tremendous benefit,” he said.

The city is the right size — big enough to provide publicity for Google, but small enough that the Google effort wouldn’t get lost in the shuffle — and has a good mix of manufacturing, academics and business, Nation said.

Dealing with regulations

The area shows mixed results in another factor, local regulatory issues, Nation said.

“There are certainly states that have modernized a lot faster and a lot quicker than Wisconsin has,” he said.

But the state has shown progress in that area, Nation and Tom Still, president of the **Wisconsin Technology Council**, said. The Video Competition Act, passed in December 2007, opened Wisconsin’s cable market to competition by allowing companies to apply for franchises to operate in any municipality. A bill pending in the Legislature would similarly update telecommunications standards by regulating landlines the same as wireless and Internet voice providers, Nation said.

“I think that Google can look at Wisconsin’s regulatory law and see that it’s changing for the better,” Still said.

Becoming a Google test site would be a huge boon to Milwaukee, Nation said. The network could attract new, high-tech companies and benefit the companies already here, especially those working in medical technology and other innovation industries.

GE Healthcare, in Waukesha, doesn’t know if it would have access to the Google network if Google chooses Milwaukee, but it would welcome the new technology and another Internet competitor, spokesman John Wheeler said.

“We’re always looking for ways to lower the expense of our own operation, obviously, and to improve the services that we can offer our customers,” he said. “We think it would help the academic and business community, obviously, which in turn would help GE Healthcare.”

The increased bandwidth could allow GE Healthcare to create applications it hasn’t even thought of yet, Wheeler said.

“A (hundred-time) increase in bandwidth would allow us to offer services that we could only dream about now,” he said.

Whether Milwaukee wins the bid, the effort has been good for the community, Barrett said.

“Win or lose, people like the competition,” he said. “There’s absolutely no down side.”

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President
Jose Olivieri
Michael Best & Friedrich

Vice-President
Mary Alice Tierney
Right Management

Secretary
Patricia M. Cadarin
Marshall & Hines Corporation

Treasurer
Bill Schwartz
Interstate Planners LLC

Assistant Treasurer
Kim Harter
Community Volunteer

Richard S. Behler
Rudolph Stone Associates

Michael T. Byrnes
Rockwell Automation, Inc.

Peter Coffey
Michael Best & Friedrich

Christina H. Fiaseca
Northwestern Mutual

Chris Goller
U.S. Bank

Cristina D. Hernandez
Quarles & Brady

Mark L. Koczela
Johnson Controls, Inc.

Kent A. Kolb
Robert W. Baird & Co., Inc.

Robert W. Kraft
RCT FirstPathway Partners

Amelia E. Macareno
Wells Fargo

Agustin Ramirez
III SCO International, Inc.

Mark Hans Rieher
Harley-Davidson Motor Company

Azara Santiago-Rivera, Ph.D.
UW-Milwaukee

Jose E. Vasquez
Religion Sponsored Ministries Milwaukee

Deputy Director
John J. Ruiz

Executive Director
Ricardo Diaz



**CENTRO DE LA COMUNIDAD UNIDA
UNITED COMMUNITY CENTER**

1028 S. 9th Street Milwaukee, WI 53204
(414) 384-3100 Fax: 649-4411
Website: www.unitedcc.org

"Celebrating 40 years of service 1970-2010"

April 13, 2010

Dear Legislators,

Attached is an important Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (MJS) editorial supporting modernization of the state's telecom regulations by recommending passage of SB-469 / AB-696. This directly supports our previous letter regarding this matter and hope it will emphasize the importance of this legislation.

The editorial explains that the market place for service has changed and it is now time to bring telecom regulation in this state up to date. The editorial endorses the legislation as "a sensible and overdue way to increase competition and encourage more investment in the state's telecommunications infrastructure."

The editorial importantly states that consumers will be well protected under the bill, and that by not acting now, Wisconsin will be left behind other states that do modernize their outdated telecom rules.

I urge you to read this editorial and vote to pass SB-469 / AB-696.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Diaz
Executive Director
United Community Center

DISTINGUISHED BOARD MEMBERS

Rev. Jerome Decola
President, Episcopalian
Jack J. Jukky



Editorial:

Revamping regulation

It's time to bring the state's telecommunications regulations up to date to better reflect the reality of competition in the phone market.

Published: April 13, 2010

Years ago, "telecommunications" meant a black, rotary dial phone connected to the wall with a wire. One company provided that service, and it made sense to treat that company as a regulated monopoly - because it was.

But that was then. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of connections rose 60% in Wisconsin, while the number of land lines fell 26%. Phone service now comes from a slew of wireless providers, Internet-based services and cable operators.

Problem is, the state's regulations don't reflect this reality. "Incumbent" phone companies, such as AT&T, are still regulated much like they were in the good, old days - back when they really were the only way to make a call. Cable and wireless companies enjoy a much lighter touch from the government.

A bill that has passed committees in both houses of the Legislature would even out the regulatory climate - mostly for the better. We support the legislation with a few caveats.

Senate Bill 469 would strip the state Public Service Commission of much of its oversight of incumbent companies. The state Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection would become the primary consumer watchdog. The bill is sponsored by state Sen. Jeff Plale (D-

South Milwaukee) and state Rep. Josh Zepnick (D-Milwaukee).

Loosening the harness on companies such as AT&T is a sensible and overdue way to increase competition and encourage more investment in the state's telecommunications infrastructure. We believe consumers will be well-protected by DATCP, which already handles hundreds of phone complaints a year. (Complaints to both DATCP and the PSC have been declining, by the way, which we take to be a sign that the relentless competition is having an effect: Customers know they have options - and so do companies providing the service.)

But legislators should strengthen the bill by insisting that the PSC retain its ability to prevent a company from eliminating service in areas of the state that don't have other viable service options. The agency also should have a role in resolving service complaints, where it has years of technical expertise. And we'd also like to see a mandatory reassessment of the legislation in three to five years to see if the changes helped consumers.

Other states are making similar regulatory adjustments; Wisconsin should not be left behind. Land-line companies, such as AT&T, should be freed of rules that made sense in the 1950s but put them at a competitive disadvantage in 2010. But the Legislature also must be assured that consumers are protected.