



May 14, 2009



## **Expanding Broadband Networks in Rural Areas**

### *FY 2010 Budget Addresses Southeast Missouri Priorities*

As times continue to change and technology becomes more advanced, the importance of broadband and high-speed internet access becomes more essential for homes and businesses. From students completing their homework, to hospitals accessing the most up-to-date information, we have become more dependent on high-speed internet. There are many in Southeast Missouri, however, who do not have high-speed internet access because the service is not available. We recently completed work on Missouri's budget, and among other projects, funding to address this issue was included.

House Bill 21 contains supplemental projects for the coming year using funding provided by the federal bailout bill passed in February. While I remain fundamentally opposed to this plan and the refusal by Washington, DC, to institute common-sense fiscal policies, I am also dedicated to making sure Missourians benefit from these dollars in the most responsible and effective way. Some of the funding available through the federal bailout plan could come to Missouri in the form of competitive grants. This is the case with the funding that would help

improve internet access for our area.

At this time, the state has estimated that grants for high-speed internet technology opportunities could total approximately \$185 million. This, combined with a \$40 million commitment by the state, would amount to \$225 million going towards high-speed connection expansion. We are dedicated to submitting a bid for these grants to expand access throughout our state. Making sure more areas in Missouri have access to the technology of today ensures that businesses in our state can compete in the global economy.

In our area, a plan has already been proposed by Big River Telephone Company to bring expanded high-speed internet to Cape Girardeau, Perry, Bollinger, and Madison counties. A new network that would help schools, medical facilities, law enforcement, and families has been developed. This new network would also create jobs and stimulate investment in our area. Big River is seeking \$25.4 million in competitive, open-bid grants, and the state took steps in House Bill 21 to make this possible.

This year, there has been a lot of discussion on how to strengthen and better Missouri's economic situation. High-speed internet access for rural areas is an important part of this plan because it allows businesses in Missouri to utilize the same technology that is available in areas with a higher population and adds high-tech job opportunities to our area. In addition, the new network would enhance many of the necessary services that are important to members of our smaller communities. I am supportive of this project and will continue to keep you informed on how these grants will be used to help you.

### **Contact Me**

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions, and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: [jcrowell@senate.mo.gov](mailto:jcrowell@senate.mo.gov) or visit me on the web at <http://www.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

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