

Capitalizing on the American Rescue Plan

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On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed into law the \$1.9 trillion relief bill known as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). One of the key components of this recovery bill was to help provide funding to states, counties, and local municipalities such as towns, cities, and villages. The US Department of Treasury provided interim final rule guidance on May 17, 2021, on how this money could be used. In general, the Treasury stated funds could be used for premium essential worker pay, lost tax revenue from tourism and hospitality, water, sewer, and broadband.

In Pierce County, nearly \$13 million is available to invest in these areas. And while many would suggest there is a need to improve our roads and highways, this money simply cannot be used for those activities. So, what should be done with our local ARPA funds? We have a solution.

We are at a pivotal point in our lifetimes. We have just experienced the blunt force of a worldwide pandemic which led to things we never imagined. Two years ago, nobody envisioned our kids doing remote learning. Telemedicine would become the only way to receive non-emergency healthcare. Millions of people were forced to work from home and endured economic hardship. Just a year ago, we saw civil unrest less than 50 miles away from



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our homes. As a result of these events, we have seen massive housing shortages, individuals looking to retire earlier than planned, a desire to live in rural areas, and a realization our world depends on connectivity.

We have a golden opportunity to invest in our future. To be a connected society, to modernize our networks, to prepare for the future of agriculture, technology, and to improve how we use our resources. The future depends on connectivity.

We encourage our county and town leaders to take this opportunity to do three things:

1. Invest in broadband infrastructure so that every home is connected in Pierce, Pepin, St. Croix, and Buffalo counties.

2. Aid low-income families who might not be able to afford devices that allow them to take full advantage of opportunities available through being connected to high-speed internet.

3. Be leaders! Help champion the efforts to be a connected society.

Broadband connectivity allows our residents and businesses to grow and thrive. Simply put, it allows everyone to Live Better. You don't have to be an "internet user"



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to understand that being able to connect with your family and friends remotely improves the quality of your life. Broadband connectivity allows our businesses to grow, provide better and higher

paying jobs, and keep people in our communities. Broadband connectivity allows the family farmer to drive better yields and become more profitable. Broadband connectivity allows our older population to live at home longer, stay connected with medical care and spend more time interacting with their families.

Nothing will be more transformational in our lifetimes than broadband connectivity to every home and business. This was the vision of rural pioneers in the 1930's who connected homes with electricity and should be the vision of our leaders today. Through local leadership, collaboration, cooperation, and thoughtful sound investment of our resources we have the opportunity to make that vision real. The ARPA funds are a vehicle to help us leave a legacy. Let's capitalize on the use of these funds to set in motion a better life for every resident and business. Let's get this done for our future!