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Nixon⁶¹ praises Socket project

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Gov. Jay Nixon visited Socket's headquarters today to celebrate the arrival of federal funding that will help extend broadband access across portions of rural Missouri.

"Just as the railroads and interstates transformed Missouri communities in decades past, these projects will help connect many more areas of Missouri with the information superhighway of the future," Nixon said. "We're going to do all we can to make sure Missourians are on board."

This week, Socket was awarded \$23.7 million from the Rural Utilities Service's Broadband Initiatives Program. Of that amount, \$16.6 million is in the form of a grant, and \$7.1 million is a loan.

Socket will use the funding to build a fiber-to-the-home network in parts of Fulton and the surrounding areas of Callaway County. The project is expected to bring high-speed Internet to about 3,033 households, 260 businesses and 36 community institutions.

Once the new fiber-optic system is installed, Callaway customers will be able to contact Socket to purchase phone, Internet and high-definition television service. Prices are expected to be competitive with costs for similar services in the Mid-Missouri market. Many users in the area now only have access to dial-up Internet access.

Carson Coffman, co-owner of Socket, said the company has installed smaller fiber systems, but this is the first time the company has attempted a project the

size of the one selected for Callaway County. "For us, this is a new thing, connecting directly to someone's house," he said.

Coffman said the project's price tag stems from the fact that "the more rural you go, the more expensive it gets" to install fiber-optic cable. But he believes because this project is the first of its kind, start-up costs are higher. "This is a starting point. It will get more efficient," he said.

For Nixon, the federal announcement was an opportunity to promote his MOBroadbandNOW initiative, which was created last summer to dramatically expand the reach of broadband across Missouri.

Socket received funding to build the "last mile." Other entities participating in the initiative want to build the "middle mile," or trunk lines that connect different regions of the state.

"We're extremely excited about the last mile," said Nixon, noting it's important for young entrepreneurs to have access to high-speed Internet. "These pockets that can't compete have kids who move to another area."

Aside from Socket, two other businesses in Missouri received notice Wednesday their projects will be funded. Big River Broadband, a subsidiary of Big River Telephone Co., will use \$24.4 million to create a broadband network in its southeast Missouri service area.

Another entity — Finally Broadband, a wireless Internet service provider — was awarded \$1 million to provide broadband in four southern Missouri counties bordering the Mark Twain National Forest.





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