

It's On Us to Invest in Innovation

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Sen. Jeff Smith writes about the new ideas and strategies that will help us build more resilient communities and a sustainable future for Wisconsin in the 21st Century.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - The 20th Century was an amazing time for technological advancements. For instance, people had been trying to fly for centuries, but in 1903 Orville and Wilbur Wright made it happen. That was just the beginning. A dozen years later airplanes were being used in World War I.

In the decades following, airplanes became a regular part of our lives because of commercial flights. And, of course, Americans began circling the planet in space by the 1960s and on the moon in 1969. This goes to show what we can do in a relatively short time with innovative ideas and a motivation to achieve great things.

We're seeing a new spark of innovation in the 21st Century to build more resilient communities and a sustainable future for Wisconsin. Like the innovators of the past, leaders today are taking charge to identify new ideas and best strategies to improve life as we know it – and the stakes couldn't be any higher.

Inventors introduced technologies that were ahead of their time, motivated by fame, cost savings or simply, to benefit the common good. Take the electric car, for example. If you do a little research you'll find an interesting history of electric vehicles that goes back to the mid-19th century. By 1923 the company, Detroit Electric, had their car traveling 25 MPH with a range of 80 miles. Unfortunately, electric cars weren't a commercial success back then because of the cost. In 1923, a Ford Model T were less than \$300 while electric vehicles were ten times that cost.

Today, many innovators are focused on protecting our shared future. Scientists at the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that if we don't take the necessary steps to cut human carbon dioxide emissions by 2030, it will be too late. Reversing the damage already done is a big challenge and may even be impossible. Putting a stop to further damage is something we can do. We just have to be motivated.

As policymakers, we're often asked if the cost of inaction outweighs the initial investment. In this case, we can't afford to delay our response any longer.

Economists at one of the world's largest insurance providers, Swiss Re, estimates the world economy will lose \$23 trillion by 2050 because of the effects of climate change including heat waves, flooding and drought. With climate changes repercussions we're already experiencing, we will continue seeing losses in agricultural production, more spread of disease and the destruction of coastal cities due to rising water levels. That's an economic reality, one that will affect all of our pocketbooks.



I'm not writing this to scare you, though it should — it's about motivating all of us. What does it take to be motivated to preserve the planet and way of life we enjoy? Will it be financial savings for you? Maybe your motivation is to protect your family's health. You may be motivated by a deep passion for environmental conservation. Whatever it may be, now is the time for each of us to discover that motivation and act.

In November, I introduced the Forward on Climate legislative package with Rep. Greta

Neubauer (D-Racine). The package includes twenty-two bills to create good, family-supporting jobs, reduce inequality, and fight climate change through Wisconsin-centered policy. Many of the bills I'm lead author of will enable Wisconsin farmers, businesses and families to implement innovative practices to address climate change on the local level.

One proposal establishes a sustainable agriculture grant program to support our farmers in developing inventive conservation measures to slow down the pace of climate change. Another bill would help homeowners make sustainable upgrades to their property to reduce carbon emissions while building long-term savings. I'm also proud of the proposal to create climate-focused scholarships to prepare the next generation to be the innovators and leaders we'll need.

Procrastinating or expecting someone else to fix this problem is unacceptable. Certainly for policymakers, we must act now. Our motivation should be clear as day. We must vow to protect our state, our nation and its citizens. No excuses.

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