

John Imes: Green New Deal: Wisconsin's call to action

John Imes | executive director, Wisconsin Environmental Initiative Feb 23, 2019



The Green New Deal resolution introduced in Congress calls for a massive U.S. mobilization over 10 years to achieve the goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions while creating millions of high-wage jobs and sustainable economic growth. Unfortunately, while the science and need for federal

action on climate change are clear, we can't expect serious policymaking on the topic to come out of Washington until 2021 at the earliest.

Fortunately, it's a new day in Wisconsin and the state is well positioned to make headway on many of the goals and objectives as outlined in the Green New Deal. For example:

100% clean energy

A new report by the Center on Wisconsin Strategy shows how the state can move away from fossil fuels and meet a 100 percent renewable energy goal by using solar, wind, biomass and energy efficiency while creating 162,000 clean energy jobs and bringing over \$14 billion in economic activity back in the state. State regulators need to step up and support smart-grid technology upgrades to the transmission network to help meet clean energy goals.

Rethinking transportation

Rethinking our transportation planning on the road to electrically powered fleets and transit vehicles (particularly school buses) should be a priority to reduce health impacts from air pollutants and work toward the goal of zero emissions. Establishing an "electric vehicle highway" of fast-charging stations and increasing the availability of homegrown, clean biofuels will give Wisconsin a competitive advantage and benefit the state's Travel Green tourism designation. Another key to reducing transportation impacts is to make all of our cities, villages and towns more walkable to foster better

community health; and to create smarter, more affordable housing and more vibrant Main Streets.

Green building upgrades

The state can also take the lead on green retrofits for state-owned buildings and leverage the permitting, approval and building codes to accelerate high-performance building, energy and water efficiency, and environmental design that meet rigorous standards. Local communities can upgrade facilities and use Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing to fund energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation projects — all without the need for taxpayer assistance.

Sustainable economic development

While more companies are embracing sustainability to meet customer demands, business as usual is slowing the transition to clean manufacturing and more sustainable commerce. The state can accelerate the emerging clean economy by engaging businesses across sectors using innovative charter agreements. This little-known provision of Wisconsin's Green Tier law can establish higher levels of environmental performance to reduce carbon emissions and other impacts while providing companies with operational flexibility. The state can also target incentives including tax credits, loan guarantees, or preference on purchasing contracts to firms that achieve

superior environmental results and institute high-road practices that protect workers.

Regenerative agriculture

Wisconsin can lead the world in regenerative agriculture practices to increase farmers' profits, rebuild soils, clean our waterways, and expand renewable energy. Whether it's organic farming or other responsibly grown methods, Wisconsin farmers and food processors can harness innovation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve crop yields while reducing nutrient runoff into our drinking water. We can also empower more food entrepreneurship, particularly for women, immigrants, and people of color to help reduce social/economic disparities and provide well-paying, accessible jobs in regional and local food production and urban agriculture.

Clean infrastructure and restored natural systems

Gov. Evers' proposal to borrow \$70 million in his first state budget to address water quality and replace lead pipes is an important first step toward investing in cleaner infrastructure. Other steps include the governor's decision to join the bipartisan U.S. Climate Alliance and his commitment to bring science positions back to the DNR, restore protections for wetlands that help mitigate flooding, preserve critical habitat and reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund — all actions we can take now to build resilience and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The Green New Deal is a call to action. Wisconsin needs an economy that works for everyone, invests in innovative policies, and takes care of workers. By investing in clean energy, clean manufacturing, water stewardship, and regenerative agriculture while we “green” our infrastructure and electrify our transportation, we can address climate change and create a more resilient, vibrant and thriving Wisconsin.

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