

# Todd Novak & Katrina Shankland: Leading on clean water

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After over a year of traveling around the state and hearing from folks across Wisconsin about clean water, we are proud of the recommendations we released as a result of the hard work of the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. As we planned our 14 public hearings around the state, we took care to complete a comprehensive tour that highlighted the geologic variability and contamination issues throughout our state and gave the opportunity to everyone to have their voices heard. Our public hearings drew hundreds of concerned citizens and over 70 organizations who took the time to share their experiences and expertise on this issue. Our recommendations are a result of listening to this vital testimony.

The \$10 million legislative package we introduced includes funding for research, assistance to farmers to implement conservation practices, support for our county conservation departments, and additional tools for mapping, well testing, remediation of contamination, and public education. Our recommendations provide support for important existing programs while also investing in new and innovative ideas, from creating an Office of Water Policy to a new program helping farmers reduce nitrogen application to prevent groundwater contamination altogether. While this legislative package is a substantial and much-needed first step, this is the beginning of an important conversation on how we can guarantee clean water to everyone in Wisconsin. It is our intention to continue this work next session.

Our state's geography is variable and diverse, and our approach to water quality must be as well. At almost every hearing, we heard overwhelming support to fully fund our County Conservation staff. These staff are on the boots on the ground, serving on the front lines of conservation. They work to develop relationships with producers and assist in implementation of best practices at the county level. Our recommendation is to fully fund the state's cost share commitment for these important staff positions.

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The task force also heard from farmers who understand that clean water is vital not only to our health, but also to the agriculture industry. Unfortunately, the current farm economy leaves few resources to be invested in conservation. Our recommendations provide resources directly to farmers to innovate, grow producer-led watershed groups, and access cover crop insurance to make cover crops more viable.

Our economy is reliant on water. Demand for a workforce that can understand and anticipate water issues and manage solutions is vital as we work to protect our water resources. An investment in the UW System to build capacity for undergraduate degree tracks and fuel research on water will put Wisconsin in the driver's seat as a leader in developing our freshwater workforce.

Everyone deserves access to clean water, and these bills are an important step forward. There is still work to be done. We look forward to advancing these proposals through the legislative process and presenting them to Governor Evers for his signature. To view the full task force report, please visit [waterqualitywi.com](http://waterqualitywi.com).

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