

Rebecca Cameron Valcq: Taking a closer look at energy efficiency

Posted on Tuesday, Jun 15, 2021

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

For the past two decades, the State of Wisconsin demonstrated to the rest of the country what it is like to offer a successful statewide program that encourages and supports cost-effective solutions to save energy and money. With the Focus on Energy Program celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, we must continue to build on the tremendous economic benefits we've achieved.

Since it first came about in 2001, Focus on Energy has provided residents and businesses with financial incentives, educational resources, and various programs in coordination with its statewide network of utility partners and energy experts. Today, the program partners with 107 utilities across the state to help Wisconsin reduce energy waste, which saves all of us money and improves the air we breathe.

The statistics of the Focus on Energy Program speak for themselves. The Focus on Energy economic impact analysis from 2015-2018 shows that at least 5,250 jobs will be created each year until 2042 if we continue to invest in the program. Investing in energy efficiency generates financial savings through lower utility bills, which allows businesses to invest their savings into growing their operations, and allows all of us to have extra money in our pockets to make ends meet. The economic impact analysis further shows that from 2015-2018, Focus on Energy investments resulted in a carbon reduction equivalent to removing six million cars off the road for a year thanks to the renewable energy projects funded through the program.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way to drive down our utility bills. If we use less energy, we then avoid the need to operate our most expensive power plants and avoid the costly construction of new distribution and transmission projects. Reducing our energy consumption through energy efficiency saves money for each of us individually, but it also adds up to reduced utility costs for everyone.

As Wisconsin continues the transition to less carbon-heavy fuel sources for electrical generation, increased funding for the Focus on Energy Program is a critical tool needed to achieve our goal of 100% carbon-free electricity in Wisconsin by 2050.

This year, Governor Evers' 2021-2023 biennial budget proposal would have increased large utilities' contributions to the Focus on Energy Program from 1.2% to 2.4%. For every \$1 our state invests in Focus on Energy, we see a return of \$4.80 in energy, environmental, and economic benefits. However, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee removed this proposal from the state budget. The program's additional funding would have resulted in an estimated \$250 million in annual energy savings for customers across the state. It would also fuel economic growth and the demand for green jobs to complete the projects funded through the program.

Increased investments in the Focus on Energy Program would continue to bring immediate benefits and pay dividends to customers and utilities for decades to come; that's why it's the right thing to focus on. That's why I'm asking our state legislature to support increased funding for Focus on Energy and make sound investments in our energy future.

- Valcq is chair of the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the PSC or any other individual Commissioner.