

# Tommy Thompson: UW scientists, innovators poised to accelerate U.S. competitiveness

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In recent years, Wisconsin's two public research universities, UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, have aggressively and strategically built a faculty roster with a wealth of expertise in some of the world's most cutting-edge and crucial fields.

From biotechnology and genomics to artificial intelligence and quantum computing to advanced manufacturing and sustainability, this broad and deep range of Badger-state expertise at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee is working on significant issues facing our society. At our other UW locations throughout Wisconsin, knowledge in such areas as health care, engineering, and logistics add significant value to the state's research portfolio.

All of it puts Wisconsin in a favorable position to create a globally competitive innovation hub that could secure some of the hundreds of billions of dollars in expected federal investment designed to accelerate the nation's competitiveness.

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Early next year, I anticipate President Biden will sign a bipartisan bill that will jumpstart the nation's investment in research. When that happens, the groundbreaking scientists and innovators within the University of Wisconsin System will be poised to capitalize. After all, Wisconsin is the place where scientific research virtually eliminated the debilitating disease rickets, led to blood-thinner treatment for heart patients to prevent blood clots, and forged early paths in RNA research

that eventually aided in the development of COVID-19 vaccines.

The United States Innovation and Competition Act has recently passed the Senate. A similar House bill known as the Endless Frontier Act was considered in the last session of Congress, and eventually separate components were passed as a series of single bills.

Both approaches promise delivery of as much as \$250 billion to invest in the study of new technologies. House and Senate negotiators plan to meet to work out differences between their legislative approaches, and I'm among the many interested observers who are hopeful that a resolution can be reached in the coming weeks. The concept has bipartisan support within the Wisconsin delegation.

The legislation would create research hubs across the country, each with a specific focus and each required to spark collaboration among universities, the private sector, and government partners. While these research hubs are worth funding in their own right, they would also position the United States as a global leader in these highly competitive areas, helping secure our country's economic prosperity and serving as an antidote to aggressive work in similar areas under way in China and elsewhere.

Wisconsin is a perfect place for a research hub to thrive. With our universities and business partners serving as a foundation, Wisconsin has the capacity to co-invest in a way to spark innovation and raise the state's attractiveness for creating these hubs. And I have no doubt that our private sector partners would be eager to join. In fact, many of them have told me so.

I appreciate the hard work of our congressional delegation on this important legislation over the last few years, and I will continue to partner with them as they near the finish line. The University of Wisconsin System is ready to seize the moment.

*— Thompson is president of the University of Wisconsin System and served as Wisconsin's 42nd governor.*