



The increasing need and demand for energy might give Wisconsin a competitive edge in keeping existing employers and recruiting new small and large businesses. We'll need to meet our current challenges efficiently and effectively to seize that opportunity.

Managing Forward



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Like most states in the nation, Wisconsin is experiencing an unprecedented rise in consumer demand for energy. More specifically, demand in Wisconsin is now projected by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) to increase 14.8% in peak demand over the next three years.

Fortunately, while the current increase in demand may be unprecedented, Wisconsin's utilities and the various regulatory bodies with whom they work anticipated it. They foresaw the growing demand for electricity and the need to significantly expand Wisconsin's access to a broader array of energy generation sources. And they understood that diversifying generation of energy would require major strategic investments in transmission of energy to make sure Wisconsin consumers would have reliable access to the energy they needed, and when and where they needed it as the increase in demand occurred.

As a result, Wisconsin now ranks highly for power grid

reliability and general energy accessibility, consistently performing above the national average and ahead of most neighboring states. In 2025, for example, *U.S. News* ranked Wisconsin 12th in the U.S. for power grid reliability, indicating relatively few and short-duration outages for consumers. Madison Gas & Electric, one of the state's major utilities, most recently placed second in the nation (ahead of places like Nashville and Austin) for the fewest number of outages, reinforcing Wisconsin's reputation for dependable service.¹

So ... hats off to the utilities, the regulators, and all the organizations, consumers, construction crews, engineers, analysts, policymakers, elected officials and community leaders who spent the past five years and more making Wisconsin both a reliable supplier of energy for its current consumers and a competitively attractive place for consumers who rely on dependable energy and whom we aim to attract going forward.

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Photo courtesy of Alliant Energy

As the hats go back on and the applause fades, however, we need to remind ourselves that all of that good work got Wisconsin to an enviable and advantageous plateau, not an enduring victory. We need now not to rest on our laurels, but to embrace the reality of another cycle of growing and evolving energy usage and ask ourselves what we learned over the past five years that can help Wisconsin become even more strategic and effective in meeting its energy challenges and opportunities going forward.

We know now, for example, that sustaining reliability for Wisconsin energy consumers will require increased generation of energy here and elsewhere and that accessing that energy will require maintenance and expansion of Wisconsin's transmission lines. The big question we face today is what else did we learn over the past years as we worked our way to the enviable position we now hold that can help us secure an even better future for our people and our state?

At the top of the lessons-learned list is the fact that despite differences of opinion, Wisconsin consumers, utilities, regulators and policymakers managed to address their individual and collective energy concerns and challenges with a commendable level of civility and commonality of purpose. We need to continue this tradition as we take on the challenges and seize the opportunities emerging on Wisconsin's energy horizon as the demand for energy continues to evolve.

A second lesson learned from the past few years is a nagging sense that technological, statutory, informational and attitudinal misalignments kept us from doing better. One wonders, for example, how attuned the regulatory language developed in the 1970s and 1980s is to the scientific and technological breakthroughs that have transpired in the nearly half a century since they were first adopted. On that note, how did we wind up in a situation, on the one hand, where the drive for a cleaner environment fueled a major commitment to develop greater reliance in Wisconsin on alternative energies, and on the other hand, generated prolonged and costly delays in the construction of the transmission lines needed to get that alternatively generated electricity to consumers?

That said, we do need to recognize that meeting



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all of those expectations at this particular juncture in time is a pretty challenging assignment, not just for the utilities, but for all of us. A significant part of the increased demand, for example, will come from large data centers driven by the rising demand in digital and other technological operational needs of the people, employers, health care, public safety, education and other governmental institutions.

We also need to be sensitive to the magnitude of both the challenges and the opportunities we find ourselves facing. On the challenge front, if Wisconsin does not meet this rising energy demand, the communities in it will not be able to retain and recruit the workforce needed to protect and grow economically and enable their communities to thrive. On the opportunity front, if Wisconsin can meet the demand, businesses sensitive to their need for more energy will as a matter of necessity favor markets and states, such as Wisconsin, that currently have a reputation for high-performing, well-

regulated energy management and systems.

How well the state's public and private decision makers and consumers at every level, in every walk of life, meet that increasing demand will determine the economic, social and general wellbeing of generations of Wisconsinites for decades to come. For all of that reason, the most important lesson learned thus far may be that we need now, more than ever, to concentrate our time and energy to understanding each other's concerns and needs more fully so that we can turn the issues that divide us into challenges that unite us.

In order to seize this opportunity to help recruit and retain employers large and small, however, Wisconsin utilities and consumers alike will need to do everything they can to be as cost-efficient and effective as possible in generating, transmitting and utilizing our energy resources so that the investments that have to be made now to protect and secure energy access in Wisconsin are competitive with the rising demands and costs in other states. ●

¹ Review the U.S. News rankings for power grid reliability at bit.ly/beststates-energy