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We Must Act Immediately If We Are To Mitigate Climate Change

By Rep. Gary Hebl

We are in the midst of another hurricane season, and once again we come face to face with the devastating effects that climate change will have on our planet. Earlier this month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that carbon emissions need to be drastically cut back to save the planet, and we need to do so in the next decade. We are already seeing bigger storms, record flooding, and warmer temperatures, yet politicians beholden to the fossil fuel industry are not willing to act on climate change before our planet is unable to recover.

We have heard from the President of the United States and U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), both admitting that climate change is real, but that they are unwilling to do anything about it because they don't want to "destroy our economy" by battling climate change. This is just not true. In reality, the jobs of the future are in renewable energy. In the United States, more people were employed in solar power in 2017 than in generating electricity through coal, gas and oil energy combined. Investing in renewable energy will not destroy our economy. It will create more good paying jobs than the fossil fuel based industries and protect our environment for future generations.

We seem to be constantly rebuilding cities after powerful hurricanes and superstorms. We saw this after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and Hurricanes Harvey and Maria in 2017. In September Hurricane Florence devastated parts of North Carolina. Earlier this month, Hurricane Michael caused untold property damage and killed at least 46 people after making landfall on Florida's panhandle. It also caused "catastrophic damage" at Tyndall Air Force Base. Infrastructure, homes, businesses, and military bases will all have to be rebuilt. This will be no small task and it will be very expensive. It would be cheaper if we spent our tax dollars preventing these kinds of disasters rather than cleaning them up afterwards.

Here at home in Wisconsin, the majority party shows the same disdain for the environment. This session, we saw numerous bills that were passed to satisfy business interests at the expense of the environment. One of the big bills that passed allowed for the filling of more wetlands than ever, a dangerous proposition that will lead to increased flooding. This is especially concerning considering all of the flooding we saw in Wisconsin this year.

We have, once again, seen how devastating the Foxconn project could be to Wisconsin's natural resources. Less than four months after breaking ground on their new building site, [Foxconn has already been fined by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#) for failing to properly manage storm water runoff after September rains. Along with all of the exemptions that the majority party gifted to Foxconn, the outlook is bleak for Wisconsin's environment.

As the ranking Democratic member of the Assembly Committee on Environment and Forestry, I know how important it is to fight for our state's natural resources. It will take innovation and forward thinking to fix the problem. But it is going to be a much cheaper endeavor to prevent disaster than it will be to recover from it. And we have to start now.

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