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## Bright ideas for smart energy

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University students are teaching Montana valuable lessons about spending money wisely and efficiently.

The Smart Building Initiative of student governments at Montana State University and the University of Montana calls for the entire University System to adopt energy-saving, high-performance building standards for all new construction and major renovations.

UM and MSU student body presidents gave updates on the initiative to the Board of Regents in May, and again in November. In the course of their study, the students learned that the Montana Legislature in 2009 already directed that all state agencies set high-performance building standards.

However, that directive has yet to be fulfilled. As reported last week by in The Missoulian and The Billings Gazette, the state Department of Administration recently hired a consultant to lead the process of developing building standards. The process has been slow, according to the state engineering division, because no money was appropriated to implement the Legislature's directive.

Much is at stake. The state owns around 4,500 buildings and structures with about 31 million square feet. Nearly two-thirds of the space belongs to the Montana University System.

The system's two flagship campuses in Bozeman and Missoula spend more than \$12 million annually on utility bills, including natural gas and electricity. The 14 other in-state colleges and universities spend millions more.

"If we can control part of those energy costs, we can control one part of the cost of education," UM Provost Perry J. Brown told The Missoulian. "It's good for the state and it's good for the students."

Student leaders are expected to ask the 2013 Legislature to consider reinvesting any energy savings back into projects to achieve additional savings.

We agree with Brown that, "the Montana University System can take a lead on pushing these standards forward."

In fact, UM has already started using Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards to guide new construction and retrofits. Upgrades in facilities made since 2009 are yielding \$420,000 annual in utility savings, according to Tom Javins, UM's associate director of engineering.

In a report to regents, student leaders said they intend for energy-efficiency upgrades to be self-sustaining over time. The projects will focus on equipment and personnel, student, faculty and staff engagement, accounting procedures and how to retain the savings within the University System.

Other energy-efficiency projects have been undertaken at other campuses. Building in efficiency has been standard practice at Montana State University-Billings for years.

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But consider the potential benefits of consistently applying high conservation standards to every major state project. Let's not waste any more time or money. Energy efficiency is an investment that keeps returning benefits every time lights are turned on or the heating, ventilation or air condition is running. The university students have the right idea with their Smart Building Initiative.

— The Billings Gazette

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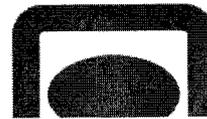
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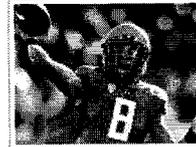
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