

# Sustainability investment guarantees returns

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Sustainability makes sense. It's more than just "going green," it's positioning our University and the environment to be in the best shape possible both now and years down the road. Sustainability affects everything from our energy bills to coal emissions to the shape our buildings are in. Aiming ourselves toward sustainability now puts us in a better position for the future.

On Friday, after Gov. Pat Quinn spoke at the iHotel, Chancellor Robert Easter and President Michael Hogan signed the Campus Sustainability Compact. We became the first university in the state to sign the compact, which is a renewal of a 2005 initiative. It makes sense for the University of Illinois, the state's flagship university and a research giant, to be the first. We need to continue pushing forward to be ahead, rather than catching up with, the move to sustainability.

The new campus Climate Action Plan is promising — and when our editorial board spoke with Easter on Thursday, he was adamant that the plan is more than just an aspiration. He said it is "attainable," which means students should be looking for its provisions to become realities.

The long-anticipated (and long-stalled) wind turbine project is, slowly, moving toward becoming one of those realities, a sign that the winds indeed may be changing.

This increased enthusiasm from our new administration makes sense from a financial standpoint. Sustainability projects consistently have solid returns for the University, especially those that increase energy efficiency.

On Friday, Quinn and Easter were right when they praised University students for voting to increase the student fee for sustainability funding from \$5 to \$14. That extra \$9 represents an investment that will have solid returns — for us and the students who follow us. For example, Krannert's LED lighting, installed last winter and partially funded by the sustainability fee, cost about \$450,000. The project is expected to save about \$70,000 annually — and more than \$1 million in the next 20 years, when energy savings, lighting replacement costs and labor costs are considered.

And that's just one project, in one building. These measures add up.

Now that the University has signed its compact, it needs to move toward signing some contracts — ones that, like the wind turbine, will be concrete examples of sustainability and bring tangible benefits. As students, we need to continue letting the administration know that this is an issue we care about. We need to look for these promises to be fulfilled.

Yes, it may take time, especially in our financial climate. But with the high costs involved in not embracing sustainability, it just makes sense. We are glad to see that the changes in University administration have brought promises of further sustainable efforts. But plans and promises are the first step. If nothing changes, all the compacts and commitments signed are just wasted paper.

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