

For Michigan's future, innovative projects are key for recovery

by Rose Harr, CEO & President of BlueWare

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The White House expects the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to create or save 109,000 Michigan jobs over the next two years. These jobs will play a significant role in building the economic future for our beloved state.

The stimulus also includes \$847 million to improve Michigan's highways and \$550 million to improve water and energy systems. "Public works" projects like these bring much needed jobs to our state, and many here are ready to pick-up a shovel or jackhammer. While this short-term work is much appreciated, we also need to identify sustainable, long-term growth opportunities for Michigan workers.

As we focus on where to devote our state's stimulus funds, we must not lose sight of the opportunity to be innovative -- to find new ways for us to compete not just here in Michigan, but globally in a world growing smarter, smaller and "flatter."

Michigan's willingness to embrace the innovative, smarter infrastructure projects -- such as those in healthcare, "smart" electric grids and broadband initiatives -- will generate the jobs we need and also help build the foundation for a brighter future.

While the spotlight here continues to shine on the automotive industry, it might seem that improving Michigan's healthcare system, for example, is not a vital priority. Yet revamping our healthcare infrastructure will have a substantially positive effect on many constituents within our economy.

At President Obama's first regional healthcare forum, hosted in Dearborn last month, Governor Granholm spoke about how reducing healthcare cost through reform was a critical part of the solution for our state's auto industry. An investment in healthcare IT is essential to lower the cost of care for businesses and employees, accomplished by better linking together patients, providers and insurers.

In February, I was invited to Washington by Congressman Sander Levin to provide insight on the status of electronic health records and the U.S. healthcare industry. We discussed how a U.S. stimulus act would provide the missing legislative support to drive the adoption of electronic health records and technical innovation that will create new jobs and enable hospitals and physicians to increase their quality of care, reduce errors and lower overall costs for patients.

A study from IBM and the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation estimate that a one-year investment of \$10 billion in healthcare IT would create as many as 212,000 new jobs in the U.S. My company, based in Cadillac, is poised to create 400 new jobs in the next 5 years as a direct result of the Obama Administration's goal of interoperable health records by 2014 and the large investment our country is making to accomplish it.

Michigan is a model for smart healthcare innovation. The University of Michigan Medical School, which consistently ranks among top medical schools in U.S., was the first school in the country to own and operate its own hospital and today churns out many of our country's most knowledgeable physicians.

And soon members of the U.S. House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee will visit Genesys Regional Medical Center, a 410-bed hospital in Flint. This hospital will demonstrate its innovative electronic health record system that securely shares information not only within its own walls but also externally with other area healthcare providers.

In Michigan, we understand how to embrace our local innovations to drive social and economic development. We must continue to apply innovation to our healthcare system and pursue other smart initiatives as we get Michigan back to work.

These stimulus funds come with high stakes and great opportunities. If government and business leaders can focus now on how we can innovate to build smarter infrastructures, they will prepare our state for a prosperous future.

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