"The advantage of unmanned aircrafts or remote piloted vehicles is that they can stay in the air much longer, fly much closer, record everything. It's really tremendous technology when used right and I think North Dakota is the perfect place to test it first because we do things right."

Goehring, who also sits on the North Dakota Industrial Commission, sees the energy industry incorporating this technology into their business practices to help in a number of fields.

"For the energy industry I see it as a way to safeguard our energy resources to look at pipelines, to look at all the infrastructure out there including roads," Goehring said. "And then also inspect and stay on top of where those tank batteries are, what is going on in well heads, and the pads out there. What's happening in energy production in general, very good way to inventory."

U.S. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., has been working with industry, government and universities to ensure the state will be prepared for the next boom, which she believes will be directed by safety and is inevitable due to our vast and diverse resources.

"Anyone who has been involved in the energy industry knows that you have to fly over your transmission lines. You have to fly over your pipelines," Heitkamp said. "This could be a huge safety opportunity to do surveillance on safety issues, whether it is a pipeline, transmission line, well pad, producing well that maybe someone isn't on site all the time, but you will have the opportunity to check on it remotely."

She added there will be additional benefits to the state with the UAS industry too.

"And at times we are looking at a workforce challenge this can be an incredible opportunity," Heitkamp said." And we believe that whether it is law enforcement, border security, whether it is in production agriculture, whether it is in energy, that there is going to be a tremendous opportunity for remotely piloted aircrafts going forward in North Dakota."

The agency estimates

7,500

commercial drones could be flying within five years across the nation's airspace.

Currently the FAA prohibits the commercial use of drones, but with the help of North Dakota and the five other test states, operational guidelines are being drawn up. The agency estimates 7,500 commercial drones could be flying within five years across the nation's airspace. According to Goehring, we have entered the beginning stages of the next big thing in North Dakota. He believes the majority of the UAS will be in the agriculture industry, but will be easily transferable to other industries.

"They are talking about 85-90 percent of all the new commercial applications for UAS are going to be in agriculture — and that's going to be fantastic," Goehring said. "Granted you we will probably never have the same type of technology the military has, but then we don't need it. Because what they are developing is going to work great for agriculture. It is probably first going to be the specialty crops, those high end value crops and then it is going to migrate into the rest of production agriculture."

Goehring continued saying this industry will be another example of bridging the east and the west communities together through industry, government and education integrating University of North Dakota, North Dakota State University, test sites and the Bakken in a number of public private endeavors. His belief is this industry will increase the state's science

Image courtesy of Carrington Research Extension Center
UAS research at the Carrington Research Extension Center