

Ohio: Building An Advanced Energy Industry

By Richard T. Stuebi

Ohio has long been a pioneer in the energy industry. John D. Rockefeller began working in the oil business in Cleveland in 1863, leading to the founding of Standard Oil in 1870. Ohio coal production dates back even further, to around 1800. Throughout the 20th Century, the nation's largest electric utility, Columbus-based American Electric Power, was the first to pursue several major technological advancements in power generation and transmission.

Ohio's pioneering spirit will be an invaluable asset in tackling the enormous energy challenges that now face the human race. While the conventional energy industry enabled tremendous improvements in standards of living and quality of life during the 20th Century, the conventional energy industry's success has bred a deep dependence on fossil fuels, and this dependence on fuels severely threatens us in the 21st Century. The supply of these fuels is increasingly uncertain, and the burning of these fuels is increasingly affecting our planet in negative ways.

It is therefore increasingly clear that the conventional energy industry as we know it today cannot be our sole source for continued human advancement in the coming decades. The maturation and growth of advanced energy technologies – prominently including renewable energy – will be essential to solve society's daunting energy challenges. And, because energy is among the largest and most critical of all sectors of human activity, the emergence of an advanced energy industry represents an immense economic opportunity for those who have the vision to pursue it.

In Ohio, we have that vision, and we are pursuing it. Working alongside many other institutions in the state, The Cleveland Foundation is promoting an advanced energy agenda for Ohio, which is receiving broad support from across the spectrum of constituencies. This advanced energy agenda includes both local adoption and deployment of advanced energy for the betterment of our citizens, and the development of advanced energy technologies and businesses that can become global leaders in their market segments.

To promote the increased use of renewable energy in Ohio, several factors are in our favor. Ohio already has one of the stronger net metering provisions in the country, thereby improving the customer economics of on-site power generation options such as photovoltaics. Ohio's solar resource compares favorably to Germany and other markets with wide scale solar energy adoption. Similarly, Ohio's wind resource is quite good – perhaps surprisingly good to some – and a number of wind project developers are actively pursuing project opportunities. Several Ohio cities and towns have forward-thinking environmental and sustainability policies that encourage the use of renewable energy.

And, Ohio has a substantial array of assets that are well-suited to attract and nurture advanced energy businesses.

Our supply chain of industrial suppliers is unparalleled. Our location and transportation infrastructure allows us to effectively serve a uniquely high number of potential customers in the U.S. and Canadian markets. Our academic institutions have world-class capabilities in many industrial disciplines, such as polymers, nanotechnology and engineering. Our quality of life – low housing costs, short commute times, health care facilities, cultural institutions and sports teams – is exceptionally high.

Even though we have some advantages, our journey is just beginning. A large number of Ohio companies, organizations and individuals have recently begun to come together to develop a regional advanced energy strategy. The strategy will include two components: (1) how we produce/consume energy locally to reduce economic and environmental burdens to our citizens, and (2) what segments of advanced energy activity in which to build world-class excellence.

Ultimately, we want to be known around the world as a place that sets the “best practices” for advanced energy utilization – including both energy efficiency and clean energy production. And, we want to be known around the world as a “go-to” place for advanced energy technologies and businesses.

We know that Ohio is considered by some to be a “rust belt” state; an unlikely place for advanced energy to seriously take root. True, our heritage has been in heavy industry and manufacturing. And, true, our economy has been beset by tough times. No doubt, it will take some time for Ohio's commitment to advanced energy to become widely demonstrable, evidenced by significant progress. Clearly, there will be many difficulties and even a few setbacks on our path forward.

But when we look into the future, we see Ohio's commitment to advanced energy paying large and lasting dividends. We see revitalized green neighborhoods teeming with vibrant cultural and commercial activity. We see customers paying lower and more predictable energy bills. We see improved local air quality and reduced contribution to global climate change. We see thousands of jobs producing goods and services used worldwide.

We invite you to contact us at The Cleveland Foundation or our colleagues in Ohio to learn more about what we're up to in advanced energy. If you want to participate in the deployment of renewable energy in Ohio, we think you'll be pleasantly surprised by the opportunities. If you want to participate in building an advanced energy industry, we think you'll see that Ohio is the place to be.

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