



## **Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act** **Op-Ed by Steve Melink, Business Owner**

Fellow Business Leaders:

I believe our country needs a strong national energy policy that leads rather than follows the world economy; that significantly reduces our dependence on foreign oil and natural gas; and respects the natural environment for future generations. For this reason I support the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act now being considered by the U.S. Senate.

As a member of the Ohio Business Council for a Clean Economy (OBCCE), I join with other leaders and ask our customers, suppliers, associates, and competitors from around the state to call on Congress to act. The OBCCE is a network of business leaders spanning a wide spectrum of industry and commerce. We stay competitive in the world market by recognizing and seizing opportunities for positive change. And transforming Ohio's and America's energy infrastructure is one such opportunity.

Our company has reduced its building energy costs by 75% compared to a conventional office by implementing proven and practical energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy (RE) solutions. Given that buildings consume over 70% of the electricity produced in the U.S., imagine the impact if all businesses and homeowners were encouraged to get serious about saving energy.

Of course it's easier to maintain the status quo by burning and wasting energy like it will always be cheap with little or no consequences. But that's not a plan for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Energy will not always be cheap, and energy will have increasing consequences relating to our economy, national security, and the environment.

After all, how many energy crises will the U.S. have to suffer before we learn our lesson? Do we want our economy controlled by foreign dictators? Do we want our economy managed by a few super-powerful oil companies? Do we want our economy constrained by supply and demand forces as China and India start growing again? Do we want Americans lives endangered protecting our 'national security' interests in the Middle East? Do we want to risk polluting our air, land, and water like China already has? What kind of world will our children inherit because of our addiction to fossil fuels?

Opponents label this bill an energy tax, but I view it as an investment opportunity. EE and RE can yield better returns than stocks, bonds, and real estate. And while rates may have to slightly increase, actual usage savings can more than offset this increase as our company has already shown. Opponents also label this bill a job killer, but I believe the new energy economy will be bigger than any other economy the U.S has seen in its history. Our company and many others becoming part of the energy supply chain are better positioned than most to create jobs rather than lose them.

I would also say that most opponents of the bill have never really tried EE and RE as a solution. Contrast that with some of the largest and most successful companies in the world and you get industry leaders like GE, Walmart, Toyota, Applied Materials, Google, and Duke Energy. A whole host of Ohio businesses also know this based on their increased diversification into energy-related technologies - from manufacturing, to installation, to service and maintenance.

I do agree that heavy industrial manufacturers who spend, say, more than 10% of sales on energy will be more impacted than other businesses. But this makes an even stronger case for EE since a small improvement can yield a large impact to the bottom line. It also makes a stronger case for RE since the fuel source for solar and wind power is forever free. Ultimately though, the ACES bill is not about protecting a particular industry as much as creating a new economy with far greater potential.



Another benefit of a national energy policy would be that it promotes a standard set of rules by which businesses can plan for the future. In addition, putting a price on carbon would unleash unprecedented market forces of investment and innovation in clean tech. While the new Ohio SB 221 RPS requirements and other recent State legislation are a move in the right direction and make Ohio a regional energy leader, they represent a patchwork solution, at best, on a national level. A comprehensive national energy policy would allow the U.S. to more quickly mainstream EE and RE and lead the world again in creating real wealth.

Eighteen years ago Congress passed the Clean Air Act and this solved the acid rain problem. It did not cause energy prices to go up and it did not cause the economy to shrink. In fact the ensuing decade marked the longest economic expansion in American history. Just as important, we saved tens of billions in health benefits annually and we are all better for it as a result.

America and Ohio have been business and technology leaders for over 100 years. We led the industrial age with Ford's mass production of the automobile. We led the flight age with the Wright Brothers' development of the airplane. We led the computer and information age with the invention of the vacuum tube and later the microprocessor. We led the space age with the Apollo space program and several brave astronauts. We led the digital age with the creation of the internet and World Wide Web. Are we going to give up on what could be the biggest age of them all – the energy age – and let the Chinese lead the world in clean technologies? Thomas Friedman, NY Times columnist, recently stated this is the Sputnik of our generation.

Opponents' argument that we should not pass this bill unless China and India do something similar is small-minded. First, China is starting a green revolution that will make it the dominant solution provider for the world if we don't get our act together soon. Second, the U.S. should never shrink from doing the right thing because of what other countries may or may not do. Leaders should lead and not negotiate their principles and values.

I think we can and must lead the world again, and one way to ensure this is to support a strong national energy policy. Our company is only a microcosm of what is possible in Ohio and across the U.S. Let's embrace this landmark bill as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the U.S. and world safer, stronger, and healthier for today and future generations!

Stephen K. Melink, PE  
President/CEO  
Melink Corporation  
Founding Member, Ohio Business Council for a Clean Economy  
October 1, 2009