

Hearing on H.B. 554

Testimony of Judy Rosman, President of RosmanSearch and most importantly, mother of two.

Chairman Dovilla, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Ashford and members
of the committee:

My name is Judy Rosman, and I am here representing my own interests as a mother as well as my interest in helping the State of Ohio to have a strong economy. I am here to tell you a couple of personal stories to illustrate how the incentives you do or do not set impact Ohio families.

First, I want to share with you that while Ohio had a strong renewable energy standard for utilities, we had a strong market for SRECS, and at that time, my husband and I decided to power our house with solar. The economic proposition was a strong one—our system, while an investment, would pay for itself within seven years thanks to the combination of savings in electricity as well as the sale of our SRECS. When the renewable energy standards were frozen, the market for the SRECS basically disappeared, leaving our SRECS with virtually no value. It will now take approximately 21 years for our solar system to pay for itself. In the meantime, we made an observation—Astrum Solar, which installed our system, closed its offices in Ohio, leaving us as the consumer with no local contact to service our system.

Second, I want to share with you that our experience putting up our panels was not easy thanks to our local Mayor and Town Council, which tried to stop us from putting solar panels on our house for nearly three years while it “studied” the issue and deliberated about what kind of solar ordinance it should pass. Through this process our daughter became deeply interested in developing solar energy as a successful business enterprise because of the many health and environmental benefits of solar energy, which produces energy far more cleanly than coal and other fossil fuel sources. She is currently a Freshman at MIT studying renewable energy engineering.

While I am pretty proud that our daughter is at an excellent engineering program, I am distressed that there are very few jobs in Ohio for her to come back to, thanks to the lack of renewable energy standards to drive investment in renewable energy in Ohio. Sure, she can find plenty of work in other states which have a strong renewable portfolio standard, including other states which, like Ohio, have a lot of cold and cloudy weather, including New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts, which are three of the top ten states in the US for solar energy. It is the Renewable Energy Standard that drives the market for solar energy and the size of the solar energy industry in a state. Lots of sunny weather is not required.

I also found that just like Ohio chased Astrum solar out, along with many, many other solar energy providers, by reducing the demand for solar energy, Ohio has a long history of chasing away all the business and jobs that we could easily have right here in Ohio to support Ohio families.

I learned that First Solar is one of the largest solar companies in the world, that it was started right in Toledo, Ohio, by two Ohio engineers who desperately wanted to keep the company in Ohio. After struggling with policies set by the Ohio Legislature, the company finally decided to open its major facility in Germany, where the government had set a very strong renewable energy standard and incentives. Later it moved its headquarters to Arizona, which similarly has a very strong renewable energy standard and incentives. First Solar, which was a company native to

Ohio, born in Ohio, which was ours to lose, now has well over 6,000 employees, many of whom are employed in manufacturing. Don't we need manufacturing jobs in Ohio? Those should have been Ohio jobs! My daughter should be able to come back to Ohio and work at their main headquarters. But she can't because our state government at that time did not have the foresight to invest in the industries of the future. And by the way, that is just one company in one sector of renewable energy, which produces one particular type of solar product and mostly does big commercial projects. The residential rooftop installations like mine would be business for other companies. While shopping for a rooftop solar system, I learned that there are many types of systems, and the technology is improving all the time to include new options. In addition, we would have all kinds of work related to wind energy projects, geothermal projects, and others.

Out of curiosity, I looked up the number of jobs there are related to coal mining in Ohio. By comparison, according to the Ohio Coal Association website, The Ohio coal industry directly employs close to 3,000 individuals. All of the people directly employed by the coal industry in Ohio are fewer than the number of employees employed directly by a single solar company that was started in Ohio and which we should have worked hard to keep in Ohio. And like I said, that is just one company. Imagine how many jobs we would have in Ohio related to clean, renewable energy if we passed a strong renewable energy standard. We would have all kinds of manufacturing jobs, engineering jobs, construction jobs, installation jobs, management jobs, advertising jobs, and even more legal jobs, because we would need so many lawyers to handle all the deals and contracts!

Coal provides over 69% of Ohio electricity. Coal mining began in Ohio around 1800, according to the Coal Association's website, and if the most that industry has to show for it is roughly 3000 mining jobs, then quite frankly, I think we are protecting the wrong industry, giving up something great for something that is steady and familiar but does not show any great potential for the future.

Am I worried about families losing their coal jobs? Of course I am. But I am even more concerned that we are not creating new jobs in the industries of the future for our children. I also think we are smarter than that. If you all do it right, we can probably think of some way to incentivize retraining and retooling for our current coal miners so that they could work in some of the manufacturing jobs that would be created if we had a robust renewable energy industry right here in Ohio. I would hazard a guess that most of the coal miners might prefer a nice, clean factory job if they had the skills. And incentives for new training programs would create even more new jobs as we would open up solar schools and other training facilities, right here in Ohio. Are you that good? I think you are. That is why we elected you!

I am tired of Ohio being known as being part of the "Rustbelt." I think we are better than that. I think we could be the Midwest EnergyBelt, or Because Ohio links the Northeast to the Midwest, we could become known as the CleanTech Corridor. There are lots of great things we could be. I have to believe that we are smart enough, good enough and creative enough to figure out how to actually become some of those things, instead of just complaining that we don't have new jobs while passing policies to protect the old industries that have been here for centuries but are not likely to grow in the future nearly the way that renewable energy can. I hope you will join me in looking towards the future of jobs in Ohio—and help us create the thriving renewable energy industry that our children deserve. Our children are counting on us! Please don't let them down. Please let this bill die in Committee and replace it with legislation that will create the renewable energy jobs Ohio needs and which our workers deserve. The jobs will be located somewhere. The question is whether Ohio will have its fair share, or whether we will keep turning the renewable energy industry away.