

Honorable members of the OH House Energy Committee,

My name is Lori Saine and I am a former Colorado State Representative and former Weld County, Colorado Commissioner and I represent American Power Play. I'm writing in support of HB 15.

Recently, I passed a model policy approved by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) that encourages community energy and agrivoltaic projects as a solution towards American Energy Independence and creating more competition in the energy market.

ALEC is the only organization for lawmakers adhering to and promoting the Jeffersonian values of limited government, free markets and federalism and their endorsement of community energy is an important development.

Colorado has one of the longest-standing community energy programs in the country and I wanted to share my experience working with our farmers and ranchers in Eastern Colorado and how small community projects, five megawatts or less, have breathed new life into our communities.

Weld County Colorado has one of the most productive oil and gas basins in the nation, but they have also embraced community energy as a way for small farming and ranching operations to survive the volatility of crop markets and increasing inputs on all fronts.

Our rural farmers and ranchers feed the rest of Colorado and the world. Weld County is one of the top ten producers of agricultural goods in the nation.

And rural Colorado culture is deep and patriotic, but it's fading fast as our farmers and ranchers age out and the younger generation is finding it difficult to afford land and the uncertainty of that lifestyle. With community energy, they have 20-40 years of reliable, passive income to offset large capital start-up expenses.

Both Rural America and rural Ohio are aging rapidly and the farming culture that made the heartland great is dwindling --and so are the tax dollars to support emergency services and schools in rural Ohio.

With new tariffs, the reduction of certain farm subsidies, and the Secretary of Agriculture's aversion to ethanol; the American farmer needs a free market source of income to keep the family farm operating and in production.

Meanwhile, the energy market is so regulated that state lawmakers are leading with policies to unlock innovations like community energy projects which provide a decentralized approach to energy production.

Producing energy closer to where it is consumed can make the electrical grid more resilient and reliable. And the tax base produced by community energy can power rural schools and firefighters for decades to come.

Recently, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce held an Energy Symposium focused on how energy production and capacity issues are tied to the manufacturers and technology companies that Ohio is hoping to attract on the national stage.

DOE Secretary Chris Wright has been evangelizing for years that if we care about people, we care about energy. Prosperity, health, a higher standard of living, and job creation proportionally follow energy production. And the Trump Administration has not been shy about an “all the above” approach to unleash American energy on American soil.

Ohioans have responded by building manufacturing plants in Ohio to build community energy projects with Ohio labor—now they just need lawmakers to do the rest.

There are no other sources of energy production that the average American farmer or landowner can readily connect to the grid and produce power for themselves and their neighbors; small, decentralized community energy is the first major opportunity to provide competition in a market that is not very free.

In Weld County, we found that community energy isn’t replacing farming, it’s working alongside it. Projects are often located on less-productive land or grazing lands for a variety of livestock. In Colorado, there are community energy projects growing wheat and alfalfa under solar panels.

Community energy can also generate energy while giving shade to animals in feedlots, Hog farms, and other animals like angus cattle which don’t fare as well in hotter climates. With the advent of drip tape, robotic drone tractors that weed and feed, the future of farming is energy and technology.

Community energy in Colorado provides a long-term, stable income for farming and ranching families and is part of our state’s “all of the above” approach to energy production, providing more competition in the market and lower energy bills for all.

We found that community energy pays its own way, pays for its interconnection to the grid, and any upgrades needed to keep utilities whole.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lori Saine
Former Colorado House Representative
Former Weld County Commissioner
303-995-7111
Lori@americanpowerplay.org