

SENECA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Shayne E. Thomas

Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 188

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Troy Balderson, Chair

Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Chairman Balderson, Vice Chair Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as a proponent for Senate Bill 188. My name is Shayne Thomas and I am a Seneca County Commissioner.

My background is in the private sector. I know from my 25 years' experience in banking and as a business owner that growth comes from smart investments combined with an entrepreneurial spirit. If you have a vision for the future, do your homework, move decisively when opportunity knocks, and back it all up with hard work, you can grow a company, a community, or a county.

That's our situation in Seneca County today.

In my county, we look forward to the future development of a wind farm by Apex Clean Energy: a planned 200-megawatt Republic Wind facility in a rural portion of Seneca County. This would generate enough energy to power 57,000 homes and represent a large investment in our tax base. It would create hundreds of jobs during construction and infuse millions of dollars in into the county.

And during operations, the wind farm would continue to deliver economic value for decades. Family farmers and other landowners would receive lease payments that would supplement their income and provide stability to their operations. The community will benefit from sustained tax revenue for local governments and schools and from decades of increased procurement, jobs, and investment involved in maintaining and operating the wind turbines.

I come before you today to seek the inclusion of reasonable wind setback standards at or near the pre-2014 levels. We have been assured that reasonable setbacks will allow the much-needed and much-desired Republic Wind project to move forward.

Property owners strongly support this project. In my county, landowners are voting with their feet by signing up for wind leases that would place wind turbines on their family's ground. There are limited other opportunities for economic development in this rural part of our county. This is an opportunity to grow the tax base for our rural schools with a \$400 million-dollar investment that would provide \$36 million in revenue for the schools over 30 years.

Reasonable setbacks will financially assist our townships and county as well, with \$600,000 paid annually from the project.

Reasonable setbacks will help diversify the income of farm families and rural dwellers through lease payments that will continue for 30 years. Nearly \$30 million in direct payments will go to landowners and their neighbors.

Reasonable setbacks will help retain families in rural communities by providing diversified revenue streams to the farm and off-farm job opportunities in wind.

I ask that the Committee take prompt action to restore reasonable wind setback standards to Ohio law by favorably reporting out S.B. 188 and recommending it to the full Senate.

Utility scale wind is a desired investment in Seneca County with the prospect to greatly increase the tax base in our rural community. We need you to take action so this much-need, much-desired economic development activity can move forward.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

Shayne Thomas, Commissioner
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