Governor hosts inaugural Energy & Economic Summit

On September 21, over 900 attendees gathered at the Ohio State University Union in Columbus to discuss the future of energy resources and usage in Ohio.

Convened in part in response to a deficient national energy policy, the Ohio Governor’s 21st Century Energy & Economic Summit was organized by the Columbus-based independent, non-profit research company, Battelle, with the purpose of informing an energy policy for Ohio.

In his opening remarks, Governor John Kasich expressed this reasoning. “Why don’t we fashion an energy policy that’s creative, imaginative and where we work together . . . If we can do this, Ohio can have a low cost, sustainable, independent and strong energy policy that will lift Ohio and create jobs and help our people and most important – send a message to the rest of the country: if they can do it in Ohio, why can’t we do it in Nevada, why can’t we do it in Florida, why can’t we do it as America.”

Stressing Ohio’s comparative advantage in manufacturing as it relates to its potential for manufacturing components for renewable energy technologies, he added, “We have a great opportunity to lead on energy. And why? Because I think Ohio is a microcosm of the United States.”

Panelists of the two-day Summit ranged from representatives from oil and gas companies like the Chesapeake Energy Corporation and the Ohio Oil and Gas Association, to executives of Ohio utility companies such as American Electric Power and Duke Energy. Additionally, Ohio auto and energy manufacturers, members of environmental nonprofits, business associations and representatives from several Ohio universities served on panels.


One of the main themes present throughout the Summit was education. In his keynote address, President & CEO of Battelle, Dr. Jeff Wadsworth, stressed education’s importance to Ohio’s economy, noting that Ohio should “train for a need,” in terms of educating its students for the energy demands of the future.

Taking considerations put forth from the Summit, along with ideas from environmental leaders as well as Ohio energy users and producers, Gov. Kasich and his policy team will work with the Ohio legislature to create an energy policy for Ohio slated to be crafted by next spring.

“Our goal now is to create a model and a policy . . . [to] give our young people a vision of the future, [and] make America stronger, while we make Ohio stronger.”

To learn more about the discussion, visit http://ohioenergysummit.wordpress.com/, which features blog posts from the Summit’s panelists and moderators about their positions on developing energy policy for the State of Ohio.

Webcasts of the Summit are available online at http://www.battelle.org/conferences/ohioenergy/.
The day before the Governor’s 21st Century Energy and Economic Summit, Battelle sponsored a Pre-Summit Student Conference for student representatives from a number of Ohio’s universities and technical colleges.

Titled, “Powering and Empowering Ohio in the 21st Century,” the pre-summit focused largely on the importance of translating education in the classroom into sustainable jobs in Ohio’s future energy economy.

Students from 12 Ohio institutions attended the pre-summit, including The Ohio State University, Ohio University, Bowling Green State University, Stark State University, Case Western Reserve University, Central State University, The University of Toledo, University of Dayton, Zane State College, Marietta College, Cincinnati State and the University of Cincinnati.

Five students represented OU at the pre-summit, their degree programs ranging from mechanical and chemical engineering to neuroscience and journalism.

Barbara Wheeldon, a Ph.D. candidate in chemical engineering, served as one of OU’s student ambassadors and says the summit provided her with a better understanding of the issues surrounding the policy climate in Columbus.

“I took away a good idea of what the Governor wants to have happen as far as energy policy goes in the state.”

The pre-summit panel themes included, “Tomorrow is yours for the Making: Energy is the Driving Force,” “So you Got Your Degree and A Job – Now What?” and “From the Classroom to the Laboratory to the Boardroom.”

Featured speakers included Ryan Augsburger, managing director, public policy services of the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association; Jim Petro, chancellor of the Board of Regents; Mike Morris, chairman and CEO of American Electric Power; and Marty Toomajian, president of the energy, environment and material sciences division at Battelle.

Additionally, Governor Kasich made an appearance at the pre-summit, urging students to find their passions. “Purpose,” he said, “is about moving the world just a little.” He continued, “The minute you decide what you want to do is the minute education becomes relevant.”

Wheeldon, whose research is in bio-based polymers explains that the summit helped link her current research with a similar sort of purpose.

“I’ve always been aware that I can make a difference by engineering polymers with a smaller environmental footprint... Attending the summit, I have an even better view of the energy issue and how it affects the environment and our society. I can see my place in the energy world more clearly.”

As for the outcome of the summit, students like Barbara Wheeldon hope to see an increase in available information.

“I think the best thing that could happen is that the public at large could be given a clear picture of what’s being done and why.”

As a student ambassador to the summit myself, I was also fortunate enough to learn from some of the state’s leading energy experts.

The summit’s panels touched on issues central to the Ohio economy ranging from utility prices and distribution to the controversial hydraulic fracturing. And while the OU student team discussed that we would have liked to see more debate amongst panelists and more hard-hitting questions from the moderators, we learned a great deal from the summit – information which is rarely discussed in detail in public forums.

For me, the summit underscored the need to reframe the energy conversation as an economic conversation for the State of Ohio. I’ve observed from speaking to friends and peers a limited awareness, stemming perhaps from a lack of readily available information, of the synergy between Ohio’s energy consumption and its economic future. Clean or alternative energy technologies are often (correctly or incorrectly) lumped in to purely environmental rhetoric, and for this reason, the opportunities they may have to create sustainable manufacturing jobs for the State of Ohio tend to be overlooked.

Through panels and discussions amongst the student ambassadors, the summit made evident to me that as students about to embark into a trying economic climate, being a part of the discussion for developing alternative energy is of the utmost importance. Encouraging conversations amongst our friends, family and peers is vital, enabling us to turn our sights “from the classroom to the laboratory, to the boardroom.”

- Rebecca Cochran