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Guest Column:

By Steve Stivers

President & CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce

614-228-4201

Solar Energy's Hardwired Connection to Economic Development in Ohio

Ambitious corporate renewable energy goals are the common thread linking Ohio's latest massive economic development stories.

Intel's \$20 billion announcement is still reverberating throughout the state and the country. As Ohio Lt. Gov. Husted put it, this is "an opportunity of a lifetime for our state." One industry in particular is paying very close attention to the coming needs of massive economic operations like this — utility-scale solar development.

The ongoing transition to a more diverse, home-grown energy portfolio represents a massive economic development opportunity to our state, as well as an opportunity to increase Ohio's energy independence. We are seeing increased demand for solar and other renewable energy from large employers across all sectors of the economy. Over 300 companies have 100 percent renewable energy goals, including dozens of employers in Ohio such as banks, manufacturers, clothing companies, automakers, retailers, tech and many others. Ohio is one of the most competitive states in the country to attract new business and grow existing companies, as we've seen by the many announcements over the last few years. We must give these companies, like Intel, a stable path forward for more renewable development in Ohio.

Utility-scale solar projects coming to the state face one of the most detailed siting processes in the country and a thorough, fact-based review of proposed projects across all energy forms ensures regulatory certainty and consistency. Without this reliable process, Ohio's economic growth could plateau due to uncertain future renewable energy supply.

Ohio has a history of being on the front lines of the energy sector and the solar industry in Ohio continues that leadership. As Ohio companies increase their investment in local energy generation, they are also spurring new economic activity into Ohio's rural economies. Beyond being an essential economic development lever, the utility-scale solar industry can also bring \$18 billion in direct economic benefits and 55,000 jobs to Ohio over the next decade, according to a 2020 Ohio University study. Along with a dynamic workforce and state-wide economic growth, utility-scale solar development will be a catalyst for additional investment, satisfying goals new corporations, manufacturers and technology companies have for their energy supplies.

Projects undergoing Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) review could eventually power Intel's new multi-billion-dollar investment in Licking County, adhering to Intel's 100 percent renewable energy goal by 2030. Thus, it is

imperative that Ohio continues to support solar development to meet the energy purchasing demands of current and future investments in our state.

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