

Ohio Republicans eye new era of energy, development under Trump

By Anna Staver
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS- Ohio's new House Speaker is looking forward to the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump and not just because they're members of the same political party.

Speaker Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, thinks the new administration will make it easier for him to achieve his goals -- especially those on [energy production](#), development and Medicaid. New legislative committees Huffman announced on Tuesday reflect that newfound freedom.

"I do think we often ran into a roadblock with the current administration on some of the things we wanted to do," Huffman said.

For instance, President Joe Biden's administration put up roadblocks against states requiring certain Medicaid recipients to work. With former President Donald Trump set to be sworn in for a second term next week, [state officials already have put in a waiver request](#).

"I think, and smarter people than me think...that the new administration will ease up on the ability of states to deal with the Medicaid enrollment," Huffman said.

He also talked about the possibility of raising the age limit for that work requirement. Ohio's Department of Medicaid requested it apply to [people ages 18 to 55](#).

State Rep. Tristan Rader, a Lakewood Democrat, said in a statement that work requirements are just another name for Medicaid cuts.

"There is no evidence that these policies increase workforce participation — but there is ample evidence that they cause harm, leading to more families falling through the cracks," Rader said.

On Tuesday, Huffman also unveiled new committees for the House that put a spotlight on some of the priority issues he thinks will be better received by the Trump administration.

For example, Huffman and his counterpart in the state Senate both created standalone energy committees instead of leaving it under the umbrella of agriculture and natural resources.

Huffman is betting the Trump administration “eases up on the ability of Ohio and other states” to choose how they power their grids and “lower energy costs and provide for development for Ohio.”

That means more drilling for oil and natural gas.

“I don’t think solar and wind have the capability of producing the energy needed,” Huffman said.

Demand for electricity is surging across Ohio. Data centers that power artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies want to gobble up more power than the state can currently provide. Grid operators and utilities say Ohio is approaching an [energy cliff where demand could overtake the available power supply](#).

“We can’t bring these folks here if we don’t have a new way of producing and distributing the power,” Huffman said.

At the same time, the state has made it harder for some renewables, such as changing the rules to [make it easier for locals to block wind and solar farms](#). Huffman personally opposed a solar project that [developers recently said they were abandoning](#).

Cleveland.com reached out to House Democratic leadership for comment.

“I think Huffman’s intuition is probably right,” said Greg Lawson, a research fellow with the conservative [Buckeye Institute](#). “I think the new administration is going to be open to what a lot of states want to do.”

That’s especially true, Lawson said, since the U.S Supreme Court overturned a legal precedent known as Chevron deference. A 40-year-old doctrine where judges generally deferred to federal agencies on how to interpret ambiguous federal statutes.

“The elimination of it might have some impact in the Medicaid arena,” Lawson said. “But I suspect it’s going to be a lot in the construction and energy fields.”