


Rust Belt to Renewable Belt

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

BY NORMAN W. JOHNSTON

 **NORTHWEST OHIO AND SURROUND-**ing areas of Ohio have often been called the rust belt because of their old traditional manufacturing base. Ohio, in fact, has lost hundreds of thousands of these types of jobs, leaving behind closed factories.

NewsFlash

EUROPEAN RETREAT

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The European Union has compromised on its goal of breaking up large power companies. Now the EU plans to strive to open energy markets without requiring French and German electric and gas utilities to shed distribution businesses, according to the *Associated Press*.

Renewable energy companies have now started up in our area and seem to be well on their way to helping create new green jobs. Toledo has become a center for photovoltaic solar energy. The University of Toledo Wright Center for Photovoltaics Innovation and Commercialization was already a leading

force in research in this field and has received over \$30 million in personal, state, and federal funding in photovoltaics in the last two years. New professors are moving here to join the university, the training of students is progressing rapidly and advanced ideas on PV are flowing to industry.

Solar companies such as First Solar, Solar Fields, Calyxo USA, and Xunlight have hired over 1,000 employees in Toledo with high-paying, long-term jobs. The cost of photovoltaics based on new technology developed here is decreasing to where



Norman W. Johnston
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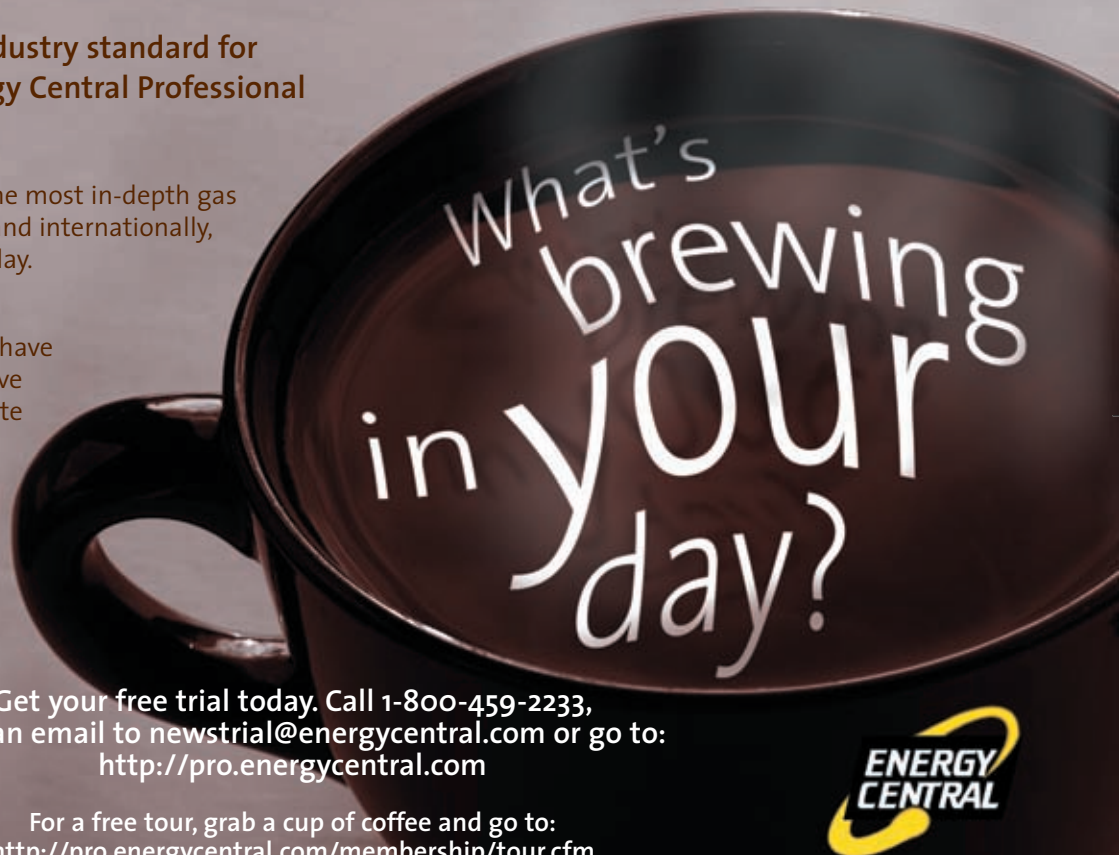
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» LEGAL EAGLE

it is competitive with other forms of electricity generation using fossil fuels. While the cost of fossil fuels continues to increase, the cost of sunlight will be the same in 20 years. Fossil fuels are needed for plastics, substrates and other uses and should not have their British thermal unit content wasted. Even more direct jobs and thousands of indirect jobs in installing solar, glassmaking, equipment building are being generated as these companies grow.

In Northwest Ohio, several community business leaders organized and worked together to make this happen. The organization grew in 2007 to a statewide group called Ohio Advanced Energy and included wind companies, fuel cell groups and biomass companies. The organization worked with a coalition consisting of the Ohio governor, senators, and representatives and other groups to pass a bill which was recently signed by Gov. Strickland. This bill required Ohio to have 25 percent renewable energy by 2025. Business-oriented legislators ensured the bill had benchmarks, a solar set aside, and penalties for non-achievement. The renewable energy bill therefore created an Ohio market for Ohio's research and development and the renewable industries it created. The energy organization is available to help such industries interested in an environment with positive government, strong universities, and a history of taking inventions and creating industries to locate here.

For the United States to move ahead, business leaders need to help their states pass renewable energy standards and work toward the federal government doing the same. At the moment, the federal government seems confused as to what needs to be done. At the minimum, the current federal tax incentives on renewables need to be extended. Laws such as Germany has passed to promote solar and wind need to be considered. Without a uniform U.S. approach, many companies will continue to locate in other countries. By industry leaders promoting

renewables rather than stonewalling them, we have helped move Ohio from the rust belt to the renewable belt. Both solar and wind will be more cost competitive in the future, plus will not change in cost or availability. No other energy source can claim the same. ☒

Norman W. Johnston is chairman of Ohio Advanced Energy, chief executive of Solar Fields and vice-chairman of Calyxo.

NewsFlash

NORTH DAKOTA LINE

State regulators have approved most of a 61-mile transmission line connected to two large wind farms. Minnkota Power plans to spend \$36 million on the project that will run to a substation near Fargo.

The ruling did not include a small stretch of the proposed line still under review, according to the *Associated Press*.

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