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## Commentary: In Midwest, bipartisan support for clean energy

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*By Alli Gold Roberts*

Get consumer-brand companies, investors and state lawmakers from both sides of the aisle together in a room to talk about clean energy, and watch what happens.

Common sense prevails, and clean energy investments and policies come out on top.

At the recent NASEO Energy Outlook Conference in Washington D.C., Ceres and NASEO (the National Association of State Energy Officials) offered state energy officials a rare opportunity to connect with consumer brands and investors to discuss renewable energy and energy efficiency and the implications for state energy policies.

The response was overwhelming. Over two dozen representatives from 18 states, including Oklahoma, Utah, Minnesota, Michigan, and Missouri, packed the room. Unlike our national representatives in Washington, these state officials—representing red, blue, and purple states alike—managed to reach some key areas of agreement.

The conversation was rich, pointed and issue-oriented. Here are some highlights.

General Mills and eBay discussed their corporate commitments to clean energy and the importance of supportive state policies in encouraging such investments. Impax Asset Management, Calvert Investments and Hannon Armstrong—all members of Ceres' Investor Network on Climate Risk (INCR)—detailed their efforts to expand clean energy investments,



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and policies that will help them do more, such as third-party power purchase agreements (PPAs), state renewable portfolio standards and the EPA's proposal for reducing carbon emissions from power plants.

“As investors in a wide range of companies—from utilities to consumer goods companies—we're always dismayed to hear the antiquated argument that policies intended to reduce pollution are bad for business,” said Stu Dalheim, a vice president at Calvert Investments. “In fact, we believe the standards EPA has proposed for power plant carbon emissions provide an opportunity to scale policies that work and catalyze corporate clean energy efforts.”

State officials, in response, talked about their efforts to diversify and decarbonize their energy portfolios. Governors and state energy officials from around the country have made the development and implementation of state energy plans a priority, especially in light of EPA's Clean Power Plan. Many states are grappling with their own efforts to expand renewable energy, attract investment and create jobs.

Key findings from the discussion include the following:

**Clean energy policies work.** Energy officials from several Midwest states discussed the value and importance of clean energy incentives in helping to lower energy costs, cut emissions, boost investment and create jobs. It's important to recognize when policies have led to success. Renewable portfolio standards, alternative energy tax credits, and solar rebate programs are all examples of policies that have moved the market and helped create a burgeoning clean energy industry in states like Iowa, Hawaii, Minnesota and Kansas. Many of these policies have been tested and achieved positive results for communities around the country.

**Policy attracts investment.** In 2013, [eBay committed to sourcing 8% of its energy from clean sources by 2015](#). It worked with the Utah legislature to pass a bill making contracting for renewable power possible in the state. The legislation enabled eBay to power a new data center in Utah with solar, fuel cells and waste heat.

According to a recent report, *Power Forward 2.0*, 43 percent of Fortune 500 companies have goals for boosting renewable energy sourcing and reducing carbon emissions. Among the largest Fortune 100 companies, 60 percent have these goals and are saving a combined \$1.1 billion in energy costs annually through their efforts.

**Diversification and choice is key.** A free market allows individuals to choose the technologies and tools they want to invest in and innovate to overcome challenges. In many states across the country, it's still illegal for companies to enter into PPAs and procure renewable energy, even when it may be the cheapest source of energy. PPAs allow companies to lock in a fixed rate for their energy costs for up to 20 or 25 years, making renewable energy

thrive in Midwest states

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an attractive choice over fossil fuel energy sources which are more prone to volatile price swings.

**Policymakers need to hear more from the private sector.** Multiple state energy officials expressed an interest in hearing from more companies and investors about their support for, and adoption of, clean energy. Multiple states expressed that they hadn't heard from investors and companies adopting clean energy in their states. There have likely been missed opportunities for public-private partnerships, investment opportunities, and innovation.

Clean energy solutions are about dollars and cents for policymakers, companies and investors around the country. It's clear that there's more work to be done and the private sector needs to continue to speak up about the need for policies to help level the playing field, combat the impacts of climate change, and drive investment into the states.

*Alli Gold Roberts is a Policy Associate at Ceres.*

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