

# Scott Coenen: The conservative case for Wisconsin clean energy

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Over the past few decades, conservatives have lost any input into the discussion over clean energy, allowing more extreme fringes to co-opt the conversation and steer national clean energy policy. This failure by conservatives to engage in a robust policy discussion on an issue that most right of center voters support is precisely how we end up with ideologically driven, unrealistic, government centric proposals like the Green New Deal.

Conservatives cannot continue to sit idly by and allow this country's energy policy discussion to be defined by such extreme and overreaching views. It is critical for conservatives to reclaim their seat at the table by advancing forward-thinking, market-driven energy solutions that will create jobs and support a stronger economy while transitioning us to cleaner sources of energy.

Upon reflection, it is easy to see why renewable energy can become a winning issue on the right. The costs of solar and wind have dropped 80% and 60% in the last decade alone, putting these technologies on competitive footing with traditional fossil fuels. This change in the marketplace gives conservatives an opportunity to argue in support of clean and affordable energy. This issue is also about the domestic economy and jobs and America maintaining its competitive edge worldwide and strengthening its national security by fostering energy independence. For a century now we've allowed foreign suppliers in the Middle East or countries like Russia and Venezuela dominate energy markets through supplies of traditional oil. We have an opportunity here to deploy new and efficient technology to utilize resources we have right here at home.

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Last year, Wisconsin consumers spent \$15 billion on energy from out-of-state sources such as coal, oil and natural gas. In other words, every time we flip on a light switch or put fuel in our vehicles, we are sending money out of state. If we were to take that \$15 billion and divide it by an average \$60,000 in annual salary and benefits, that would be the equivalent of 250,000 jobs that leave our state annually. That's the sort of math we need to consider as we explore a market-driven transition to clean energy. Smart investments in advancing clean energy in a way that enables free-market forces to keep electricity costs down for consumers while spurring innovation have the opportunity to raise our standard of living and make the way we generate and utilize energy cleaner.

Groups like Wisconsin Conservative Energy Forum (WICEF) are working to engage policymakers on clean energy solutions for Wisconsin and our nation. As Executive Director of WICEF, I am proud of the work we do to support and advance an all-of-the-above energy strategy for Wisconsin. That includes not only investing in developing Wisconsin-based clean energy resources and solutions, but also increasing our commitment to reducing energy waste and practicing energy efficiency.

Recently, members of WICEF were fortunate enough to join together with other conservative voices from across the state to travel to Washington, D.C., where we urged conservative members of Congress to think critically about clean energy and work together to advance a realistic, market-driven, and viable conservative alternative to the Green New Deal.

While on Capitol Hill, we met with all of Wisconsin's congressional delegation about the need for conservative leadership on clean energy. We were encouraged by the conversations we had and excited to see a desire to learn more. We hope to continue this dialogue, acting as a resource for interested members of Congress and their offices.

Of course, it is in lawmakers' best political interests to prioritize clean energy, as public sentiment is increasingly in favor of advancing clean energy solutions. According to recent surveys, more than 80 percent of voters would vote for a candidate who supports clean energy development. And more than 9 in 10 Millennials agree that we should be exploring all-of-the-above energy policies, including clean and renewable energy development. The fact is, clean energy is broadly popular with center right and independent voters.

However, in order to lead, conservatives cannot let ourselves be defined as the “party of no.” Rather than simply opposing extreme unworkable ideas like the Green New Deal, we need to put forth our own practical solutions to advance clean energy in a way that preserves reliability and affordability while strengthening our economy and creating much-needed jobs. I’m grateful that Representatives like Congressman Mike Gallagher seem to understand the magnitude of the challenges and opportunities we face—and hope our state’s other conservative leaders will take note as well.

Wisconsin has the potential to be a national leader in clean energy production. It’s time for our lawmakers to step up and turn that potential into reality—and conservatives should be the ones to do it.

*-Coenen is the executive director of the Wisconsin Conservative Energy Forum.*