Coal and Energy

Our efforts since the 2014 “freeze” on Ohio’s renewable energy and energy efficiency standards ramped up this year in anticipation of December 31. If legislators failed to pass a reasonable alternative to the original standards, they were set to be reinstated at year’s end.

Ohio Citizen Action members and allies:

- sent 10,541 personal letters and children’s drawings to Governor Kasich
- made 1,209 phone calls to the governor’s office
- signed a petition with 34,018 names to the governor

We also launched an interactive educational and organizing tool called PicMyEnergyMix, where Ohioans could not only see the current energy mix provided by their utility, but “dial in” their preferred mix as well. At least 362 people used the tool during the three weeks of our promotion and 200 shared their preferred energy mix with Governor Kasich via email.

Our focus on the governor proved wise, as he repeatedly stated on the campaign trail that any attempt to extend the freeze by the legislature would be “unacceptable”. He later explicitly threatened to veto freeze extension bills proposed in both the house and the senate, bucking his own party leadership to do so.

To kick off the post-election lame duck session of the legislature, we sent a special message to the governor and legislature by way of a projection on the Ohio state house and the Riffe Center. The next day, we held a rally on the state house steps that drew more than 50 people from all over the state.
We followed this up by bringing a small contingent of members to offer testimony on SB 320 and HB 554 in committee, including high-school sophomore Evan Vogelbaum, who aspires to work in solar engineering one day and prefers Ohio to China. Ohio Citizen Action members provided nine of the 100 opposition testimonies given between the two late November hearings.

In the final days of the legislative session, when we learned our opposition planned a veto override, we launched a grassroots blitz designed to prevent it. More than 1,702 people phoned their senators over 18 business days. On December 28, we learned that Governor Kasich made good on his veto promise and that the opposition lacked the votes for an override. This victory restored Ohio's mandatory renewable energy and energy efficiency standards and put Ohio back on track to be a clean energy leader. It also demonstrated that if the people lead, the leaders will follow.

The year 2016 also saw victory against two consumer bailouts requested by American Electric Power (AEP) and FirstEnergy for their least-profitable nuclear and coal plants. Two other proposals- one from Duke and another from AEP- had been rejected by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) in 2015. When in February it looked likely PUCO would approve these last two bailouts, Ohio Citizen Action and the Ohio Consumer’s Council petitioned the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to review them for possible conflict with Ohio’s customer choice law. In late April, the FERC agreed with us, ruling that as-written the requests made customers “captive” to the distribution utilities. This year, 3,666 OCA members and allies sent in official comments to the dockets on the AEP and FirstEnergy bailout requests.

Consumer Rights

We began organizing Ohio families against increases in residential fixed fees or “customer charges”, proposed by Dayton Power & Light (DP&L) and AEP. In a desperate attempt to shore up profits, utilities across the country have attempted to pass fixed rate hikes beginning in 2014. The good news is, widespread public opposition defeated or lessened close to three-quarters of fixed rate hike proposals in 2015. But in states like Wisconsin, where regulators approved rate increases for three utilities in 2014, the door is open wide for more of these proposals.
We oppose these rate hikes on the grounds that: A) they are not tied to usage and therefore limit customers’ ability to control their bills; B) they especially burden low-income families and seniors; and C) they discourage energy efficiency by removing the incentive of saving on monthly bills.

DP&L’s request represents the first such attempt in Ohio, but we anticipate the other major utilities will soon follow suit and that this will be a major focus for us in 2017. To date, 7,461 people have sent in official comments to the DP&L and AEP dockets at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

We also had the opportunity to collaborate with national allies on the Mind the Store campaign to remove toxic BPA from food cans at major grocery stores like Kroger. We staged two rallies, one at Kroger headquarters and one at their annual meeting, urging them to make good on their promise to eliminate BPA from Kroger brand products.
Our actions included distributing information, delivering 100,000 petition signatures and confronting Kroger leadership about the delay in implementing this consumer safety measure during their annual meeting.

**Movement-Building**

Until we “change the climate” in which Ohio’s energy policy is crafted, we will see more attacks and delays on the inevitable transition to cleaner, more efficient renewable energy. Clear and ambitious policy, crafted by legislators with broad public support, will facilitate cooperation by utilities that have up to now fought vigorously against even modest goals. Toward that vision, we kicked off a **pilot movement-building project** in 2016 to identify and score people who prioritize clean energy when voting. During a six-week period this summer, our field and phone staff identified and scored 3,279 registered voters. More than 70% said they were either definitely or moderately likely to consider clean energy among their top three priorities. In the next few years, we plan to follow up with these people and reach many, many more, educating and activating them to use their power as citizens to create their own clean energy future.

**Organizational News**

- We welcomed Cincinnatian Brooke Smith to the board of Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund in February.
- In May we held our 40th anniversary celebration in Cleveland.
- On Independence Day, we marched in the Cincinnati/Northside parade.
- In July we held our 3rd annual Rock ‘n Roll Against Dirty Coal: Live Band Karaoke Challenge in Cincinnati. The event raised over $11,000 for our clean energy campaign.
- In August we met singer/songwriter/activist Bonnie Raitt at her performance in Kettering. Later we received a generous check from a foundation with which she is affiliated.
• In September when canvassing in Cincinnati, we happened upon former Governor Ted Strickland, who signed a petition to end the freeze on clean energy standards that he enacted in 2008.

• In September, the board approved a new mission statement: Ohio Citizen Action organizes and mobilizes people to advocate for public interests. In person, by phone, and online, we engage people in actions that protect public health, improve environmental quality, and benefit consumers. Our campaigns connect Ohioans and build a movement to protect democracy and create a sustainable future.

• In November we gave our highest honor, the Howard M. Metzenbaum Award, to Marilyn Wall and the Miami Group of the Sierra Club for their tireless work to correct Hamilton County’s combined sewer overflow problem.

• During the year our field canvassers knocked on 238,836 doors, spoke to 122,657 people, collected 43,205 petition signatures and accepted 23,149 contributions. Our phone canvassers followed up with members in 10,733 conversations, collected 1,718 contributions and transferred 2,292 calls directly to decision makers on our campaigns.

In memoriam

We said goodbye to several allies in 2016, including:

• Sister Paula Gonzalez, a Sister of Charity (Cincinnati), founder of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light and an extremely articulate and passionate climate activist.

• Doreen Quinn, a Cincinnatian who over her lifetime supported many causes including LGBTQ rights, reproductive rights and the environment.

• Charlene Phelps, a Cleveland area nurse and educator who supported Ohio Citizen Action for many years.

• Carl Evert, a Pleasant Ridge (Cincinnati) resident who with his wife Marjorie and others worked with Ohio Citizen Action to hold Hilton-Davis accountable for its toxic legacy.
2016 Ohio Citizen Action Board and Staff

OHIO CITIZEN ACTION BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Ann Knotek (Cleveland); Thomas Ferguson (Columbus); Laura Rench (New Lebanon) Secretary/Treasurer; Nancy Sullivan (Cincinnati); Anne Wise, M.D. (Cleveland) President; Barbara Wood (Columbus).

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OHIO CITIZEN ACTION EDUCATION FUND BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Willa Bronston (Dayton); Matthew Currie (Dayton) Secretary/Treasurer; Brooke Smith (Cincinnati); Dick Wittberg (Marietta) President; Heather Zoller (Cincinnati).

The Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund, formerly the Citizens Policy Center, is the non-profit education and research affiliate of Ohio Citizen Action. Its Executive Director is Melissa English.

For more information, including financial information, publications, job opportunities or to make a contribution, visit ohiocitizen.org