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## How Ohio can cut energy costs and create jobs

By David Rothstein

**CLEVELAND** - *The writer, a doctoral candidate in political science at Kent State University, is a researcher at Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit institute ([www.policymattersohio.org](http://www.policymattersohio.org)) whose stated mission is to broaden the debate about economic policy in Ohio.*

Trapped between a Hummer and another SUV, each with one passenger, I asked myself, ``Are gas prices too low?''

It's true that, as this paper has reported, Ohio has seen a 30 percent jump in the per-gallon price of gasoline since December, and a 56 percent increase since April 2002. Yet, consumption is relatively stable even if griping has increased.

The best way to combat high gasoline prices is to increase our sustainable energy sources -- and the good news is we could create jobs in the process.

Americans' thirst for gasoline, regardless of price, is hardly news. If your office is far from your home, the day-care center is in a third direction and the public buses don't connect to any of the three, then a jump in fuel prices probably won't change consumption. Other countries have a different approach -- with higher prices, Europe has begun cashing in on the economic development potential in alternative fuel.

Ohio could clean up its air, reduce dependence on foreign oil, and solve part of our job loss crisis if we moved to the forefront in developing and promoting alternative energy (and revenue) sources.

Enter the Apollo Alliance. The Apollo Alliance is a nationwide, nonpartisan alliance of labor unions, policymakers, researchers, environmentalists and scholars calling for good jobs and energy independence.

Apollo recommends an investment of \$300 billion over 10 years to address three large challenges: economic problems of manufacturing job loss and domestic infrastructure disinvestment; national security issues of dependence on foreign oil; and environmental concerns.

Apollo's niche is the connection between economic growth and sustainable energy.

Through public and private investment, Apollo could profoundly boost employment, trade, wages and urban redevelopment. If Apollo were fully implemented nationwide, the nation would add more than 3 million jobs, stimulate an additional \$1.4 trillion in gross domestic product and produce \$284 billion in energy savings over 10 years.

Under Apollo, Ohio could generate \$8 billion in economic activity, \$5 billion in increased income and 130,000 new jobs.

Ohio needs a course correction. We're the fifth-largest energy-consuming state in the nation. We spend more on energy per person than any Midwest state but Indiana, squandering more than \$2,500 per person or \$30 billion annually on energy.

We're the lowest Midwest contributor to research and design programs to study renewable and alternative energy sources. Less than 1 percent of our state energy use is in renewable sources, placing us 44th among states in renewable energy generation.

There are good building blocks in Ohio. The Blue Green Alliance, a statewide effort of labor and environmental groups, is promoting renewable energy and job growth. Legislators have proposed innovations such as renewable energy portfolios and hybrid cars in the state fleet, although these reforms are currently stalled in committee. Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati all have green building coalitions, which promote affordable housing, building restoration, energy conservation and local construction.

Ohio also offers limited tax credits for environmentally friendly equipment purchases and sustainable building. But these programs are not widely advertised and the Systems Benefit Fund (that fractional charge on your electric bill) is underused to promote renewable energy.

Apollo reminds us of the undeniable link between sustainable energy and a vibrant economy. Some policies that could move us forward include:

Expanded renewable energy development. Twenty states have either renewable energy portfolio standards or laws that call for state purchasing of wind, water, biomass, solar, hydroelectric and other renewables. Nearby states such as Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois have successfully implemented portfolio standards.

The promotion of advanced technology and hybrid cars. Convert assembly lines to produce components for wind turbines and hybrid automobiles, while encouraging consumer purchasing of hybrid automobiles. Pennsylvania provides rebates for hybrid car buyers; other states require percentages of state fleets to be hybrid.

Encouraging high-performance building. "Green building" constructs and rehabs buildings and homes in energy- and cost-efficient ways. Ohio has a few dozen inspiring green buildings, but, in Pennsylvania, more than a dozen state universities use renewable and efficient building design. Hundreds of buildings there, from schools to offices, are slated for rehab. Doing the same could save Ohio money and make our houses, schools and workplaces healthier.

Other Apollo policies include urban reinvestment, improved transportation choices and investment in more efficient factories. Gas prices are going nowhere but up. Other states and countries are responding, and it's helping their economies.

Ohio should use its excellent manufacturing, construction and higher education base to get an edge on renewable and alternative energy. We can't afford to lag behind in SUVs while other states cruise by in hybrids.