

Shining a Light on Renewables: Minnesota Celebrates Clean Energy Business Day

Ella Laurent, Communications Associate • Mar. 16, 2023

Clean Energy Business Day at the Capitol is an education and advocacy day for individuals and organizations working in the state's energy efficiency and clean energy industry. For seven years, the partner organizations including Clean Energy Economy Minnesota (CEEM), Clean Grid Alliance (CGA), Center for Energy and Environment (CEE), Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association (MN SEIA), and US Green Business Council (USGBC) have hosted this event, which was held this year on March 9. The event offered opportunities for their members to network with legislators and industry experts, share business stories with lawmakers, and work collaboratively to shape clean energy policy.

About 200 participants attended and over 70 meetings with legislators were arranged, which is the largest number since 2020.



The day was full of meetings and presentations that created diverse and meaningful legislative experience for all attendees. In his remarks, Clean Energy Economy Minnesota Executive Director Gregg Mast said, "This is a momentous time for Minnesota's energy efficiency and clean energy industry. Their work is critical in helping the state transition to a clean energy economy and achieve the ambitious goals being set at the legislature." Beginning with a rally in the Capitol rotunda. Representatives from each partner organization shared their "moment of why," which was designed to evoke personal reasons for

supporting renewable energy. Building partnerships, the understanding that "policy matters," capitalizing on new policies, and devotion to members were among the themes that emerged, with all organizations seeking to present a united front on clean energy issues.



Madelyn Smerillo, CGA Senior Policy Associate, said, "CGA is focused primarily on implementation of our recent carbon free standard." She asked, "What ways can we make our permitting process more efficient? What can we add to our grid to ensure we can add these copious amounts of renewables and have a reliable and robust electricity supply?" She concluded by saying, "Building partnerships builds power; ensuring we're all connected as one voice in the industry will help us get the projects that we need to be built, built."

In his remarks, Clean Energy Economy Minnesota Executive Director Gregg Mast said, "This is a momentous time for Minnesota's energy efficiency and clean energy industry. Their work is critical in helping the state transition to a clean energy economy and achieve the ambitious goals being set at the legislature." Mast also highlighted the impact renewables can have on economic development by stating, "Minnesota's clean energy transition is growing good jobs, strengthening our economy, and providing affordable, reliable, homegrown energy."



Keynote speaker, Commissioner Grace Arnold of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, followed these presentations with a discussion on the most important issues facing the clean energy market today. Arnold indicated an urgency for change within the clean energy industry. She stated, "The State of Minnesota is at a crucial point today with tremendous opportunities to invest in clean energy" as "businesses are seeing needs across the state and the potential to address those needs, grow jobs, address challenges related to climate change, and sell clean energy technology to the

world." Commissioner Arnold concluded her remarks by sharing the Governor's proclamation of March 9, 2023, as Clean Energy Business Day in the state of Minnesota.

"Minnesota's energy efficiency and clean energy businesses are innovating and delivering clean, reliable, and affordable solutions while reducing emissions and diversifying and strengthening the state's economy, helping the state achieve its 100% clean energy goals."

Governor Tim Walz

With a few moments of time available before Representative Long arrived to speak to attendees, several members of the audience shared their reasons for supporting renewables and a clean energy future.



Following audience contributions, House Majority Leader Jamie Long highlighted Minnesota's victory in the passage of the 100% Carbon Free electricity by 2040 standard and was excited to see that "Minnesota's clean energy leadership is back." He emphasized that despite the much-deserved celebration, the work is just beginning. Setting a standard is only the first step: now we must work to implement it.

Later in the day, participants heard from several legislators who were invited to speak on clean

energy issues. Among them were the chairs of the House and Senate energy committees, Rep. Acomb (D) and Sen. Frentz (D). In addition, Senators Rarick (R) and Pratt (R) shared their perspectives on clean energy from the right side of the aisle. LiUNA Marketing Director Kevin Pranis discussed labor's involvement in the clean energy space, with special attention paid to workforce development.

CGA supported several policy priorities that were the subject of the legislator meetings, including:

- Energy Storage
- IIJA/IRA Matching Funds
- 100% Carbon Free Standard Implementation
- Transmission in Highway Rights of Way.



Minnesota hopes to see federal resources come to fruition within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. Rep. Acomb said that she anticipates positive changes set forth by the State Competitiveness Fund, soon to be heard in committee. She said, "\$100 million would be available to organizations and utilities and jurisdictions all across the state." Rep. Acomb stated that she expects these changes will advance Minnesota's ability to deploy more renewable energy and continue to support our 100% clean energy goals. Overall, each part of the day was essential to achieving the goal of the

event, which was to grow and foster connections between industry members that support advancing renewables and the clean energy economy in the state of Minnesota.