

# ENERGIZED!

## CHAD FORCEY LEADS THE PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVATIVE ENERGY FORUM TO EMBRACE A DIVERSE ENERGY PORTFOLIO

By **Jonathan Kersting**, Vice President of Communications and Media, Pittsburgh Technology Council

The Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum (PennCEF) was created by conservatives, for conservatives who want the Commonwealth to adopt an all-of-the-above diversified energy portfolio that includes an emphasis on moving to clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies.

PennCEF believes that an all-of-the-above energy policy will help create good-paying local jobs across the state, improve our grid and national security, conserve our natural resources, and position America to compete in the global energy marketplace, while securing energy independence. TEQ wanted to learn more, so we talked to PennCEF Executive Director Chad Forcey. Here's what he had to say:

**Jonathan Kersting:** So tell us about your background and what brought you to head up the Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum?

**Chad Forcey:** I started out in working in politics: first, in the Virginia House of Delegates down in Richmond, Virginia, and then ultimately in the Pennsylvania Legislature - working for Lieutenant Governor Mark Schweiker in Pennsylvania in his offices as President of the Senate. And then, continuing on to work in his administration after he became Governor at DEP - Department of Environmental Protection - where I worked from 2002 to mid-2003.

I followed up from that work to go and transition into the private sector, where I represented the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association for six years working as a lobbyist on behalf of that organization and working on a great number of issues relevant to agriculture, landscaping and water management. In particular, issues including invasive species, issues including everything from tax policy to immigration reform to the greening of our cities like Philadelphia where I worked to get a \$33-million grant from the stimulus package which I helped to add an \$11.6-billion line item for green infrastructure.

I then found my way to the Irrigation Association out of Washington, D.C., where I worked on water management across the 50 states working with state governments and local governments around the country. One of my big achievements there was getting the California water bond successfully passed so that California could deal with its water infrastructure problems and create more storage capacity and accessibility both for agriculture and for human consumption.

From there, I ended up ultimately finding out about the job with



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PennCEF as a new startup in Pennsylvania - a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization committed to clean and renewable energy. And that interested me, because I had been engaged in efforts to help promote clean air and clean water throughout my career. I had an interest in energy and what's called the "Water-Energy Nexus." And, saw an opportunity to give back some more in my state here of Pennsylvania. So I left working at the national level and came back to Pennsylvania, and here I am starting up the Pennsylvania Conservative Energy Forum.

**Jonathan Kersting:** So, what drove the founding of the Conservative Energy Forum?

**Chad Forcey:** The founding of the Conservative Energy Form goes back to, frankly, a number of us who are passionate conservatives. And, really for me, in Pennsylvania this goes back to the Ridge/Schweiker administration. For others it goes back to the Thornburgh administration. Pennsylvania has a history of very popular and, frankly, viewed through the lens of history as very successful governors - Republican - and this is not to take away from our great Democratic governors. But, for those of us who worked in Republican administrations, conservative administrations in Pennsylvania, we always had a very forward-looking view of clean water, clean air and clean renewable energy - that this was a place for growing jobs, growing our economy and taking care of our land at the same time. So, we never saw a great disconnect necessarily. However, the way that politics has evolved over the years, nationally and even at state level, unfortunately, different parties have claimed different turf for themselves.

So, while Republicans have claimed kind of the business turf, if you will, the small business world, Democrats have claimed conservation of the environmental world and it just kind of evolved that way. And that unfortunately is what happened to our politics. We've become, frankly, very tribal in our politics.

**Jonathan Kersting:** Yeah, very polarized these days.

**Chad Forcey:** Perfect word. And PennCEF is trying to just tell the story of people who are already on the Republican conservative right-side of the aisle, who happen to be in clean and renewable energy for a living or from an activist standpoint. And, telling their story and reacquainting conservation ideas to a lot of other conservatives who may already care about them, but just don't think about them in terms of technology.

**Jonathan Kersting:** So, tell our readers a little bit about some of the platforms and top goals of PennCEF.



**Chad Forcey:** PennCEF is attempting to reshape the debate and engage and, in many cases, re-engage conservatives. Many conservatives don't think a whole lot about clean and renewable energy. Not because they don't like clean and renewable energy, but because they believe that clean and renewable energy are issues sort of owned by the left.

What PennCEF is attempting to do here is to change the debate, change discussion and if that helps conservatives politically, that's great. PennCEF is more interested, however, in helping to promote clean and renewable energy with constituencies that aren't engaged or haven't been actively engaged. So, in terms of platforms, we are looking at really two big areas that I'd like to focus on here.

One is in what I would call constituent-building and candidate education. This is about spreading an overall message that clean and renewable energy is good for conservatives, it's good for constituencies and candidates on the right. It's actually going to be good for them politically and it's also good from a policy standpoint. The second piece of that is really a policy piece. What do clean and renewable energy policies look like from a conservative standpoint? And so, in that field, you're talking about freedom on private property. You're talking about farmers who are zoned out by local statutes and they're zoned out from being able to put wind turbines or solar panels on their farm because those components are not considered agricultural components. And so, we're talking about changing laws at the state level that would open up more property rights for individual landowners.

And, I should also mention national security. We believe that domestic, clean and renewable energy is the antidote to globally priced commodities that can be used as a form of blackmail by foreign regimes that are hostile to the United States, and also could be the cause for us to be engaged militarily in places like the Middle East where maybe we otherwise would not be so heavily engaged as we are and have been. So, more domestic, more local, more regional - less overseas dependency.

And oh, by the way, from a military standpoint - a military that uses clean and renewable energy is more nimble and lethal on the battlefield. So, we look at all these issues and we go to our audiences and we say, "This is why you should be engaged. This is why you should care. And, from a foreign policy standpoint, here's legislation that we're working with."

**Jonathan Kersting:** It makes sense on so many different levels. And it's amazing to see the intersections at where this plays. So, as you move forward with PennCEF, how will you be measuring success? How will you know that we are making an impact?

**Chad Forcey:** Yeah. I think that we're already making an impact. First of all, you know, if you take a look at the Commercial Pace project, which was many, many years of work on behalf of a lot of folks, PennCEF supported Commercial Pace. So, what Commercial Pace did is it created a much more streamlined method of getting low-cost loans for wind and solar development and other clean and renewable projects at the local level backed by counties. So, it's a state effort to open up some doors for local government in Pennsylvania to support clean and renewable energy development in the form of new wind turbines, new solar facilities - for private enterprises and for communities. This required legislation. It required the state to roll back some of the government red tape that was in the way of projects like this. And, it required a lot of outreach to conservatives because, quite frankly, the votes on the left were pretty much baked in. What folks in the conservational world didn't have was the support of the people on the right. PennCEF liked this project, liked this approach because it does help communities.

And so, PennCEF got involved and reached out to leaders of the Senate and the House and found a champion and its Senator Guy Reschenthaler, the western part of the state. And then, PennCEF was able to get the support of the Senate President Pro Tempore, Joe Scarnati, and the support of the Speaker of the House, Mike Turzai. And, I mean, the Republican party runs both chambers - the House and the Senate. So, I believe PennCEF was probably the most important factor. It's a lot of groups who supported the legislation. But, I'd argue in terms of getting the conservatives' support. PennCEF was the most important factor in the success of that legislation. And then, surprisingly, fewer than 30 Republicans voted against the bill in the House.

**Jonathan Kersting:** Very cool. And, last but not least - with all this exciting stuff you're talking about - how can people get more involved with PennCEF?

**Chad Forcey:** Yeah. Well, they can go to our website [www.penncef.org] and there is a link and you can also email info@penncef.org anytime you want. And we'll get you more information and help you get plugged in.

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