The Comprehensive Energy Management Plan: Evaluating risks and negative impacts

by United Students Against Sweatshops at Ohio State

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1. Administrators plan to lease OSU's energy systems to a private corporation through the Comprehensive Energy Management Plan (CEMP) for a half century. They are in the Request for Information (RFI) phase and are gathering feedback before moving into the Request for Proposal phase. That administrators have waited until after the second phase of a three-part process is over to ask for feedback is troubling. The delay suggests a lack of a democratic process, since feedback was not incorporated into other stages of the process, and it casts doubt onto whether feedback will be substantively incorporated moving forward.

2. Administrators claim that the transaction will free up money to benefit the core academic mission. However, professors argue that less money was available to academic causes than would have been available if the University had not privatized the parking lots (see attached op-ed by Dr. Weide). Furthermore, there was not democratic decision-making process that determined to which causes the money would go. So far, only 105 students received scholarships from privatization monies, and while tenure-track hires were promised, tenure-track faculty has decreased every year since 2007, in total 9.6% since 2006 Since 2012 until 2015 alone there has been a decrease of 165 tenure-track faculty (see Table 1).

3. The decision making process for the CEMP is not transparent in distributing vital information that is important for the public to know before making a decision:

    - We do not know who is bidding on our energy systems, and whether or not a fossil fuel corporation is bidding. Administrators have told students and workers that this information cannot be revealed because corporations have shared trade secrets with the university. However, we are not asking for trade secrets to be revealed, only the identity of corporations that are bidding on the University's energy systems. Even the President and Provost's Council on Sustainability are not privy to this information.
    - A private corporation will only bid on the energy systems if they will make a profit. The way in which the corporation will profit has not been made clear, and we do not know how students, staff, and faculty are going to be impacted or whether they will be exploited by this process.

4. In a previous meeting with administration, United Students Against Sweatshop (USAS) members were told that the concessionaire is required to follow our energy savings standards. However, measures that will be taken to hold the concessionaire accountable were "classified."

Furthermore, in a public meeting on February 4, 2016, the public was told that if the concessionaire does not meet our energy savings standards, they would have to pay a fee to the University. If this is the case, then it is in the University's economic favor if the concessionaire does not meet our energy savings standards.

5. The potential concessionaire will offer an affinity relationship with Ohio State, including research opportunities. While industry-sponsored research does indeed allow for highly innovate research projects, academic freedom will be limited. For instance, should fossil fuel corporation bid on our energy systems, researchers would be limited in their ability to critique the way in which energy corporations contribute to climate change. We must investigate: what are the politics of ideas and knowledge production under corporate research funding?

6. Workers will lose their dignified jobs and union status, resulting in a decreased of standard of living, and harming Columbus neighborhoods. While the affected workers are guaranteed an interview with the concessionaire, no other standards to confirm the safety of the workers are guaranteed. In meetings with administration, representatives of union are denied important information about The Plan, but the president of the CWA union estimates that at least 57 workers will be impacted. The continued use of long-term lease assets of the University mean there is no job security for any campus worker. Lack of job security will negatively affect morale of on-campus workers, and the subsequently the quality of service provision on campus.

7. Before we make a half-century commitment, we must thoroughly investigate all of the options, and research in-house possibilities. An in-house audit of opportunities and cost saving analysis has not yet been considered. The University owes it to its students, staff, faculty and the community to consider all of the possible ways to effectively manage energy.

8. USAS members demand that OSU stops the Request for Information process and all further processes of the Comprehensive Energy Management Plan, immediately. We implore that we move forward in a transparent, community driven process to manage our energy systems.

1. Introduction

Ohio State Board of Trustees and administrators, through the Comprehensive Energy Management Plan (hereafter "The Plan"), intend to sell off the control of OSU's energy systems to a private corporation for the next half century. The negotiation process is finalizing the Request for Information phase before transitioning to the Request for Proposal stage. While the University Senate will vote on The Plan, the ultimate decision-making power rests with the Board of Trustees. Further, while advisory groups can inform the administration how to distribute any resultant funds, this decision rests with the senior leadership, namely Dr. Michael Drake (President), Geoffrey Chatas (Chief Financial Officer), and Jay Kasey (VP of Administration and Planning).

Administrators justify The Plan in terms of "leveraging our energy assets as part of a long-term strategy to be good stewards of our resources, both financially and from a sustainability standpoint. This approach has the potential to strongly support students and faculty, as well as support Ohio State's significant commitment to sustainability."[1] Ostensibly, all proceeds will benefit our core academic mission. In what follows, we examine the distribution of funds from the last privatization effort of the campus parking. We cast doubt on the management of privatization funds, showing that their distribution is opaque, secretive, and did not go toward their stated intent. Next, we examine how The Plan is fraught with a similar lack of transparency and conflicts of interest, and how it will negatively impact faculty, workers, students and the environment. We conclude with our assessment of what is really happening, and our list of demands.

2. Parking Privatization

In 2012, Ohio State University leased control of its parking systems for 50 years to the Australian multinational firm QIC Infrastructure, a deal that 83.6% of faculty opposed.[2] In spite of overt discontent with privatizing the parking lots, OSU administrators pursued the agreement. In the first year alone, administrators promised funds toward four areas to benefit the university:[3]

1. Increase student financial aid and scholarship support by more than $3 million.
2. Use more than $8 million to begin to hire 8-10 percent additional tenure-track faculty.
3. Increase support for critical areas, such as the Arts and Humanities, by more than $2 million.
4. Use more than $3 million to improve campus transportation systems and create a more pedestrian-friendly campus.

We examine the first two beneficiaries, students and tenure-track faculty. The parking website has provided only one update on scholarships, which states that some money has gone toward the Eminence Fellowship for elite honors students. Thirty one students received the full ride fellowship in the first year, followed by twenty five each subsequent year.[4] In total, 105 undergraduate students have benefitted from the privatization of parking, out of a total of 58,563 OSU students. Privatization did very little to resolve students' tuition and accessibility problems for the majority of the undergraduate community.

Table 1. Source: Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

Year	Tenure Track Faculty	African American Students	Civil Service Employees (e.g. parking)	State Appropriations (% total revenue)	Tuition (Typical undergrad)	Admin. and Professional Staff
2006	3,028	3,889 (6.6%)	5,531	13.6%	$17,305	14,394
2007	3,047	3,859 (6.4%)	5,538	13.4%	$17,732	15,010
2008	3,046	3,852 (6.3%)	5,493	14.3%	$18,321	15,554
2009	3,043	3,934 (6.3%)	5,455	13.0%	$18,695	16,238
2010	2,982	3,972 (6.2%)	5,400	12.2%	$19,877	16,923
2011	2,930	3,922 (6.1%)	5,277	9.8%	$20,796	16,710
2012	2,903	3,814 (6.0%)	5,211	9.3%	$21,503	17,161
2013	2,848	3,753 (5.9%)	5,150	9.6%	$21,863	18,090
2014	2,844	3,630 (5.6%)	4,954	9.0%	$22,411	18,182
2015	2,738	-	-	-	-	-
Net Change	Down 290 (-9.6%)	Down 259 (-1%)	Down 577 (-10.4%)	Down (-4.6%)	Up $5,106 (+30%)	Up 3,788 (+26.3%)

The university's second promise that $8 million would hire 8-10% more faculty has yet to be realized.[5] Since 2007, the amount of tenure-track faculty has steadily *declined* (see Table 1). Indeed, although $35 million was allotted to hire more tenure-track faculty, even the years directly following the closure of the deal saw the reduction in the amount of faculty. Meanwhile, the number of administrators and staff increased 26.3%, and top administrators earn ever-greater salaries. In an interview with the Lantern, Allan Silverman, professor and former Chair of the University Senate, argues that paying administrators more than the actual faculty detracts from our core academic mission.[6] In 2014, eight administrators earned more than $400K, and in 2013 twelve received bonuses between $19,099 and $1,460,707.[7]

Dr. Weide, an OSU professor, sought to confirm the exact distribution of parking funds. In summer 2014, administrators informed him that it was impossible to determine the information.[8] Later, in summer 2015, Dr. Weide made a public records request for information needed to analyze the overall financial impact of the parking lease. Administrators refused to release key financial information on the grounds that these are trade secrets: "The information that you requested is considered [a] trade secret of QIC/CampusParc, and thus exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Public Records Act."[9]

Gone now are systems of accountability for the quality and maintenance of parking lots. While difficulty finding a parking spot may be an age-old problem, the dispatch reports that, "For 2013 through 2015, indicators of trouble, such as the average number of calls made per month, the number of times customers gave up on those calls without an answer and the average hold time per call have steadily risen."[10] Campus workers report that contracts with outside companies have led to hour-long delays in cases such as dealing with water main breaks. In this instance, privatization (or long term leasing for 50 years) means that services provided to the university are more difficult to hold accountable and to our campus's safety and logistical needs.

Furthermore, the parking lots generated revenue for the university to reinvest in the campus community. Dr. Weide crunched the numbers, and in a Lantern article reports, "in fiscal year 2014 OSU distributed $22.7 million from parking privatization funds to various good causes around campus... *about $3.1 million less than would have been available to these causes if OSU had not privatized parking*" (emphasis added).[11]

For campus workers, those in the union were transferred to another employment sector of the university, and kept their wages and benefits. Those not in the union lost their jobs with a severance package. Now, campus parking workers make less money with lower benefits, are stripped of union protection, and report to a multinational corporation with complaints and concerns. Ohio State is no longer accountable to campus workers and fellow Buckeyes. These working conditions are in stark contrast with the protections, benefits, and community supports afforded to University employees.[12]

3. Contesting The Plan

Our research confirms what the overwhelming majority of University faculty already knew and continue to understand: privatization comes with risks and negative impacts that do not support the well-being of Ohio State University. Energy privatization offers much the same, with many additional negative impacts for the faculty and departments, workers, environment, and students.

Administrators released the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in spring of 2015. However, it is worth noting that during public forums regarding the plan, the public learned that the idea to lease the energy systems has been in the works since 2012.[13] The fact that the public is asked to provide feedback four year years after the fact reveals that this plan lacks transparency and due democratic process.

The RFQ discusses leasing the energy systems with four broadly defined responsibilities: utility systems, energy supply, energy savings goals, and affinity relationship.[14] The contract winner will assume responsibility to "operate and maintain electric, steam, gas, heating, cooling, and associated central (production and distribution) assets serving the Columbus Campus."

No corporation would bid on the energy systems unless they had the opportunity to profit. The RFQ states that, "As part of the Concession, Ohio State will establish, and reflect in any rate structure, a program that appropriately incentivizes the Concessionaire to achieve targeted energy benchmarks, while also providing an attractive return to the Concessionaire." So how will a corporation profit from campus energy systems while at the same time improving energy sustainability and providing funds to the university?

Faculty and Departments

Many faculty members and energy systems workers believe that profits will be skimmed off already-thin budgets of colleges and departments. Each department could be charged for their usage of energy at a rate cost. Energy, like parking, ceases to be a public good – it is privatized. In any event, the future relationship between faculty and a private energy corporation is unspecified by administrators, but any such relationship will likely benefit the corporation at the expense of public educators. In one meeting with USAS, administration confirmed that this scenario is, in fact, on the table.

In a November, 2015, 556 professors responded to an Arts and Sciences survey in an overwhelmingly negative way.[15] The result of this survey revealed that 90.6% of faculty respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with, "the concept that OSU is a business and should be run using corporate strategies and practices is a useful one." Furthermore, 83.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the claim that "OSU's budget model has served ASC well," and 76.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the claim that, "OSU's senior leadership has served ASC well." Finally, 76.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed that "the idea of 'monetizing' OSU's assets (e.g., the recent 50-year lease of the parking facilities, and the planned sale of OSU's power plants and power grid), is a good one." We speculate that the profiteering motives of private corporations lead many members of faculty to hold such strong opinions.

Academic Freedom

Research agendas will also be compromised by The Plan. The RFQ described an affinity relationship between the private corporation and Ohio State: "Initiatives could include, but are not limited to, research collaboration with faculty, scholarships and internships for students, and integrated co-branded energy marketing opportunities." Energy-oriented research that is funded by a corporation will conform to energy research agendas in line with their interests, brand name, and their interpretation of sustainability.

Certainly, research at Ohio State is already funded by industry sponsors while still leaving room for academic freedom. But we must ask, what are the limits to those freedoms? That is, what is not being said?

Shell Oil and Gas is a major funder of the Earth Sciences department at Ohio State. While innovative research is produced out of this department, no research to date has been produced that critiques the way in which Shell Oil and Gas is responsible for the depletion of natural resources and profiting off of emitting carbon into the atmosphere. Indeed, Shell CEO Van Beurden acknowledges that climate change is a problem, but that he will not endorse a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energies.[16] Bill McKibben explains why not: fossil fuel corporations are already expecting profits from the fossil fuels that they plan to burn, and are trading and investing with that anticipated profit.[17]

Another instance are the Coca-Cola Sustainability Grants, which award Ohio State students with funding for sustainability oriented research. Again, innovative projects are produced but we do not see this grant fund projects that critique the ways in which Coca-Cola sustains markets for the mass production of corn for high fructose corn syrup. Corn production uses intense amounts of fertilizer and pesticides in monoculture plantations, destroying soil quality and contributing to climate change emissions. Coca-Cola also is responsible for expropriating public water sources to the detriment of local communities throughout Latin America and Africa.[18]

Shell and Coca Cola are exempt from critical research about their involvement in thwarting climate change action. Instead, these multinational corporations support research agendas and student projects that remain silent on their destructive activities. In light of our urgent need to confront and research innovative ways to stop burning carbon, how can a research agenda defined by the interests of a private corporation ensure academic freedom?

Environment

The RFQ claims numerous times that The Plan will achieve OSU's energy savings goals. According to data in the RFQ, energy consumption at our ceaselessly growing institution has increased in every dimension over the past decade, mostly using fossil fuels. Thus the report highlights "The Opportunity" of attractive compound growth in energy sales that the winning corporation will enjoy. Indeed, the word "growth" appears 19 times, in contrast to just one mention each of sustainability and environment.

The President and Provost Council on Sustainability (PPCS) later created a goal that is included in the RFI: reducing total campus building energy consumption 25% by 2025.[19] Yet the RFQ nonetheless guarantees a growing market demand for energy at Ohio State. Note well: Energy use efficiency, total energy consumption, and renewable energy sources are three fundamentally different objectives. Furthermore, in a meeting between members of USAS and administration we learned that measures to hold the concessionaire accountable to these goals were "classified". Just as with parking, secrecy shrouds energy privatization.

Yet a deal of this sort – the lease the entire energy systems at a public University to a private corporation – is the first of its kind. We have no precedents from which to consider whether or not this deal will contribute positively or negatively to our energy management and environmental goals. The answer to that will be in the details: who will manage our energy and how? Yet as already stated, that information is *classified*. Our university cannot ethically continue to pursue a public-private partnership with an energy corporation unless all of the information is publically available for research and debate.

Furthermore, students are championing sustainability goals that are much more suitable to respond to the grave and imminent concern of climate change. Namely, that our University sources from 100% renewable energies by 2030 and divests our endowment from corporations that profit off of fossil fuel extraction. As we will discuss below, the voices of students need to be a central part of democratic decision-making process at our university.

Workers

The simplest method to increase corporate profit is to slash the cost of the labor. Without adequate contractual and unionized protection of workers, the private corporation will utilize a low-wage underclass for which administration is not accountable, much like other privatized services on campus (parking, cleaning, and so on). Ohio State's official website for The Plan states that "At this time, we do not have enough information to know how employees might be affected...but this matter has always been part of our evaluation process."[20]

Surely it has been. The employees in question are part of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 4501, who in summer 2015 contract negotiations with OSU saw Article 30 substantially weakened by administrators. This article gave explicit protections against privatization, and was undermined in order to "prime the pump" for The Plan.[21] Table 1 reveals as well that the number of civil service employees decreased by 577 (10.4%) from 2006 to 2014. On this trajectory, we can expect the number of service employees to continue to drop. While the impacted workers will be offered an interview with the winning concessionaire, they are *not* guaranteed job security, and their union status is in question.

Such blatant attacks on campus workers also directly affect the vitality of Columbus neighborhoods. Union status is crucial in addressing disparities in wages for women and people of color, and in ensuring access to medical and retirement benefits, paid sick leave, and subsidy for workers' children to attend OSU.[22, 23, 24] When administrators sunder OSU workers from a union, our fellow Buckeyes endure a decline in the wellbeing of their households and families. Many faculty members research the ways to improve the well-being and quality of life for the neighborhoods surrounding Ohio State, such as Weinland Park and the South Side.[25] Yet one of the best ways to ensure healthy and safe neighborhoods in Columbus is to maintain quality working class jobs, something The Plan does not guarantee. Administrators have strict requirements of energy use efficiency ("sustainability"), but have not put in any such efforts concerning the turnover and protections of existing campus workers.

Students

Administrators claim that by selling off energy systems, they will provide better support for students. Yet, as we have learned from parking, a handful of scholarships will do little to make higher education accessible for the majority of students. And while students continue to pay an outrageous and increasing sum of money to attend University (see Table 1), the distribution of tuition dollars is not transparent and students have little say in consequential decisions. Students want to see higher education accessible for everyone, not just those who can afford it, but selling out our University does not support these ends. As a point of fact, the average debt for an OSU undergraduate is $22,250.[26]

Students pay exorbitant fees to get top quality education at this university. We are not mere consumers, but active participants in the direction and outcome of our school.

Hundreds of students recently mobilized around the need for Ohio State to hire more Black tenure-track faculty and enroll dramatically greater numbers of students of color (see Table 1).[27] However, our University should not expand the diversity of faculty and students at the expense of an energy systems workforce. Similarly, many students are organizing to build political power for more sustainable energy systems on campus. For instance, student groups believe in the possibility of achieving 100% renewable energy sourcing by 2030. Students are stakeholders, and future stewards of the environment. As such, students deserve the opportunity to be a part of a democratic decision making process that sets standards for our energy systems management and have the ability to hold our leaders accountable for following through on our commitment to renewable energies. Lastly, we believe that sustainability should never come at the expense of workers.

4. Conclusion

Administrators argue that "the university needs to consider partnering with specialists with the technical and financial ability to move the campus forward in a single, large-scale project."[28] Our position, however, is that Ohio State University is a world class research institution that already possesses every resource – from engineers to financiers to skilled workers – needed to design and execute a more ambitious sustainable energy solution, while uncompromisingly upholding the interests of faculty, workers, and students. Many faculty members and students have echoed this sentiment. The opportunity to research innovative ways to reduce Ohio State's carbon footprint and responsible manage our energy would only enhance our school's academic mission, and ought at the least to be considered as a possible option during this process. *The university owes it to its students, faculty, staff and community to consider all opportunities that could enhance sustainability and our academic mission.*

For instance, in the fiscal year 2015, Ohio State had about 22.1% of its endowment invested in hedge funds.[29] Hedge funds are a risky, highly unregulated investment vehicle that charges higher fees than other models of investments. Indeed, in FY 2015, we paid at least $19 million in hedge fund *fees* alone.[30] We implore that the university moves slowly and thoroughly investigates all of the ways in which we spend money unnecessarily and how that money could be used to forward an in-house energy initiative.

Moreover, the fact remains that far too many questions remain that merit close examination before moving forward with this process. Is a fossil fuel corporation bidding on our energy systems? How will a corporation make a profit, and how will that impact the Buckeye community? How will the money get distributed, and who will be a part of the decision making process? Crucially, at what point will the privatization of this public university cease, and how many people will lose their jobs throughout the process?

Why, then, given all of the risks and negative impacts, do administrators pursue privatization? Administrators make few decisions of importance; they receive their mandate from the Board of Trustees. The Board is not a democratically elected body. Its membership is appointed by the Governor of Ohio: currently, a man who has publically stated his commitment to privatizing all public education and dismantling unions.[31] The sixteen hand-picked trustees do not have professional training nor experience in education but are, with few exceptions, corporate CEOs and other representatives of Fortune 500 companies.[32] We need a democratic decision making process that ensures all stakeholders – students, workers, faculty, staff, and community members – have a seat at the table.

The readership may not see eye-to-eye with all aspects of our argument: let us debate these differences freely and democratically. Regardless, *workers, students, faculty and environmentalists can and must form immediate consensus in opposition to The Plan in its current form*, based on our mutual interests and stake. United Students Against Sweatshops organizes a coalition of those negatively affected and put at risk by The Plan in order to defend our University and make our voices heard. We demand that:

a) Ohio State University be fully transparent in its distribution of money and resources, through explicitly accounting for money from privatization of parking and making public who is pursuing a bid on the energy systems.

b) The Request for Information process of the Comprehensive Energy Management Plan stops *immediately*, and Ohio State University ceases from all current and future endeavors to privatize our public university and cater to corporate interests.

c) A community-driven, in-house, and fully democratic process begin in order to solve Ohio State University's critical energy supply and management issues using the world-class resources we have at our disposal.

For more information and to get organized contact usas.ohiostate@gmail.com.
Visit http://stopthesellout.nationbuilder.com for more information and for future reports.

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25. For instance, the *Mapping the Food Environment* project is an interdisciplinary team of researchers mapping food access in Columbus. Other community based research takes place in the College of Social Work, The Kirwan Institute, City and Regional Planning, and many other departments.

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29. The 22.1% figure comes from the "June 30, 2015 LTIP Summary" on page 28 of the "August 2015 Board Meeting - Finance Committee Meeting" document, available on the OSU Trustees website (cached version available here: https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:BERVg25ZziAJ:https://trustees.osu.edu/assets/files/meeting-materials/08-2015/Finance.pdf+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us). Categories we considered hedge funds were "Relative Value/Macro" (7.2% of LTIP) and "Long/Short Equities" (14.9% of LTIP).
30. Using the conservative assumption of 1.8% management fee and 18% performance fee, and using hedge fund AUM and return figures published in the "June 30, 2015 LTIP Summary" on pages 28 and 29 of the "August 2015 Board Meeting - Finance Committee Meeting" document, available on the OSU Trustees website (cached version available here: https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:BERVg25ZziAJ:https://trustees.osu.edu/assets/files/meeting-materials/08-2015/Finance.pdf+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us), we estimate that in FY 2015, OSU paid $19 million in fees to hedge fund managers.
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