

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Amazon official criticizes Ohio's wind standards in testimony

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**By Dan Gearino, The Columbus Dispatch**

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In a wind-energy debate with many recurring characters, a notable new face appeared in Columbus this week. E-commerce giant Amazon sent an official to testify at a Statehouse hearing on a bill that would encourage development of wind farms in northwestern Ohio by reversing some recent rule changes. This is an unusual foray into Ohio politics for the company.

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“Unfortunately, Ohio’s wind-turbine setback standards enacted a little more than two years ago have significantly diminished the attractiveness to further investments in wind generation in Ohio,” said John Stephenson, Amazon’s manager for U.S. public policy, in the printed version of his testimony. “In fact, the current setbacks have acted as a moratorium of sorts on new wind development.”

Stephenson was one of more than dozen people who testified Wednesday about House Bill 190, a proposal that designates northwestern Ohio as an area in which the former rules on wind-turbine proximity to adjacent-property structures would apply.

This means new wind farms in that part of the state would be able to have more turbines than allowed under current rules.

The bill is a response to a 2014 measure, inserted into an unrelated bill, that had the effect of reducing the number of turbines allowed. It did not cover projects already approved by the Ohio Power Siting Board, but it did affect several plans that were seeking approval or about to apply for it.

Amazon has been an investor in renewable energy in the states where it does business and is an increasingly visible business in Ohio as it develops data centers in central Ohio. In November, the company said it had signed on to develop a 100-megawatt wind farm in Paulding County.

A co-developer of that wind farm already had obtained the necessary state approval, so the setback rules were not an immediate concern. But Amazon says it is also interested in the big picture of wind-energy development.

“Amazon believes the substitute version of H.B. 190 strikes a balance that will allow wind development in areas of Ohio where it makes the most economic and operational sense and will help bring into Ohio more high-tech operations that increasingly depend on renewable energy,” Stephenson said.

Northwestern Ohio, designated in the bill as a specific area, dubbed the “wind corridor,” has the most brisk wind in Ohio. The territory excludes Franklin County but includes all or parts of nearly every county to the north and west.

Amazon is inserting itself into a long-running debate in which wind-energy companies and economic-development officials are trying to encourage wind farms while a coalition of property owners pushes back.

One of the prominent opponents is Julie Johnson of Urbana, who has been active in this arena, and she submitted testimony against the new proposal.

“I am here to express the opposition and anger of my community and the hundreds of voters across Northwest Ohio who have worked so hard to protect our property and families with reasonable setbacks from industrial wind turbines,” she said.

The bill is being reviewed by the House Public Utilities Committee.

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