

Solar Panels Rolling Out From Ohio

U.S. President Barack Obama relies on renewable energy

By Miriam Braun

Toledo celebrates itself as the "Solar City". And the entrepreneurs here are not waiting for the U.S. Senate to pass a new energy and climate law. Everyone there is already turning towards a solar energy economy - which also has traditional reasons.

"This factory has everything we need: electricity, water - just right here in the building. The perfect establishment for us."

James Heider sees very clearly the energy revolution from here in Toledo in northwest Ohio. He started his company, Willard & Kesley, which produces solar panels. So far, there is only one production line, but Heider has much to do:

"We will build three other buildings, such as this one. Along the road, behind me here is where the plants will be built."

Some will have to look more closely to see the transformation of energy in Toledo. Here, only a few miles away from the Motor City Detroit, the crisis has struck particularly hard. People lived for decades on the manufacturing of glass, where customers came from the auto industry and the construction industry. But that tailed off even before the great crash 2008. A revolution was needed. It wasn't just to stop climate change, but also out of necessity. Norman Johnston, chief of the solar module manufacturer Calyxo, explains of his product:

"We laminate a piece of glass behind a heat-treated glass. When the light falls on it, the electrons jump from one to the other plate. Solar cells are nothing more than coated glass. This is what we've produce here since the Second World War. We just have our technology expanded, and now can produce electricity from glass."

Calyxo belongs to the German solar manufacturer Q-Cells, second largest solar producers in the world. Calyxo is based in Toledo and has done research for decades at the university. Industrial workers are dying from the glass industry, so millions of dollars in state funds support these start-ups in the region. Johnston is less inclined to the national government than on supply and demand.

"I think we cannot wait for the government. It is simply too slow for us who wish to do business, as we are here in Ohio. Many Americans help themselves and start simple."

Americans continue to consume as much energy per capita than any other nation. But the solar technology that is produced in Toledo goes mainly to Europe. The start-up Xunlight is among the most successful. CEO Xunming Deng:

"The solar panels are flexible and can be easily rolled out on rooftops. We mainly sell to Germany, Italy and France."

Toledo has perhaps been at the right place at the right time: Up to \$ 100 billion from Obama's current economic stimulus package has already been directed to the promotion of renewable

energies. In Washington, the debate on climate legislation is in full swing. In the proposed legislation, there are emissions trading allowances per company. In autumn are the Congress elections, which may come before the U.S. Senate will approve a draft.

If Obama loses his parliamentary majority in the elections, that could delay a climate of law for an indefinite period. But in Toledo, they don't rely on Washington anyway. The demand of the Americans is here, believes James Heider of Willard & Kesley:

"America is back. And you see it clearly and I believe it: The United States does and will be the largest buyer. In 25 years, you'll need at least 1,000 such facilities."