

The Daily Record

U.S. Rep. Bocchieri tours OARDC Bioenergy Laboratory

By Chris Kick
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WOOSTER -- "That's the real deal right there."

That was U.S. Rep. John Bocchieri's reaction Tuesday after seeing **Schmack BioEnergy's** laboratory, where scientists are conducting research into ways to turn food, animal and human waste into usable energy.

The lab is located at The Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, and the stop was part of a much larger tour of the facility where the congressman identified with the financial need and the economic and environmental promise of its projects.

Bocchieri's tour began inside the meeting room of OARDC Director Steve Slack, where he discussed alternative energy and research with a host of OSU administrators, Wooster Mayor Bob Breneman and the Wayne Economic Development Council's Brian Gwin.

Bocchieri, D-Alliance, outlined the fundamentals of the federal stimulus package and how he expects it will impact Ohio -- specifically the 16th District, which he represents.

The \$8.2 billion package to Ohio poses several opportunities for improving the local economy, including fossil fuel energy research and development, smart-grid related activities, energy efficiency and conservation and renewable energy research.

Bocchieri outlined the importance the agriculture industry will have in helping restore the economy.

"I know the importance of agriculture in the state," he said. "One of every seven jobs is connected to agriculture; it's an \$80 billion industry. It's the number one industry in the state, so it's going to play an important role in our recovery."

Bocchieri, who also serves on the House Agriculture Committee, said the research facility was one of the reasons he joined the committee.

Breneman updated him on the progress of BioHio -- the joint effort between the city and OARDC to form a research park where businesses will work with OSU scientists to find commercial applications for their research.

The mayor said it's been in the planning for many years and is now taking form. During the tour, the group drove to the BioHio site on Secrest Road, where the road is being widened.

"This is just a huge potential, to be able to take that knowledgebase and then to be able to utilize it into a product that can be manufactured and utilized throughout the state and country, is something that would be wonderful," Breneman said.

Slack said a big part in the process was just getting some dirt moved, which shows people years of planning is taking form.

"Until you actually see dirt moved, the reality doesn't hit people that things are happening," he said.

Associate Director Bill Ravlin told Bocchieri about the dandelion-to-rubber project, a research effort to find a domestic source of rubber. Bocchieri also toured the biomass-to-energy pilot plant and various waste-to-energy digesters.

"It's exciting what you're doing here, and it's exciting the opportunities that are presented with this type of investment," Bocchieri said.

"It seems like the stars are all aligning, as far as the university and Wooster," said Stephen Nameth, director of OSU's Agricultural Technical Institute.

Nameth said ATI is a perfect educational setup for what is taking place.

"We're poised to move in the direction of work force training in this area," he said. "I couldn't think of a better match at this point."

Bocchieri praised the university for its investments and asked questions of faculty and staff



Photo By Chris Kick
U.S. Rep. John Bocchieri (left) gets an explanation of the workings of **Schmack BioEnergy** from Clemens Halene, vice president of engineering with the company. Bocchieri toured some of the major research projects at the OARDC on Tuesday, in preparation for state allocation of federal stimulus money.

throughout his tour, commenting multiple times on the economic potential being created and the cost savings of alternative energy.

But one challenge the state could face, Bocchieri said, is getting the money spent on time. He estimated the time-frame to be about 90-180 days.

"The real fight, in my opinion, is that we don't lose these monies coming back to the state," he said. "It's going to be \$8.2 billion coming back to the state that we've got to spend what in government time is a 'New York minute.'"

Stimulus money won't solve everything, he said, but he expects it will help put an end to the recent slide.

"This is not going to be the be-all, end-all for economic woes, but it is going to act as a backstop for further job loss and actually create some jobs along the way, too," Bocchieri said. "It's a significant investment into the things that we think are going to be the leading edge of the 21st century economy."

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