

TABLE OF EXPERTS: ENERGY, JULY 22, 2025

# PUMP THE BRAKES ON STATE'S RENEWABLE ENERGY GOALS



From left to right: Daniel Montante, Gary Marchiori, Stephen Hotz, Michael Casciano, Daniel Hagen, and David Flynn at the Buffalo Business First's Table of Experts Energy at the Hilton Garden Inn in Buffalo.

PHOTOS BY: MARK MULVILLE

New York State wants to be a national leader in the transition to an electricity system powered by renewable energy sources.

Using renewable energy supplies and phasing out the use of fossil fuels, according to NYSEDA, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, will improve air quality, support a more resilient electric grid, and spur a clean energy economy through supply chain investments, workforce development and job creation.

New York to that end has established

goals and deadlines that are ambitious, some say too ambitious, but the transformation will benefit all its residents, state officials say.

Buffalo Business First Publisher John Tebeau recently met with leaders in Western New York's energy sector to discuss how the region is contributing to the state's initiatives.

Joining the conversation were:

- Michael Casciano, president and COO, NOCO LLC

- David Flynn, partner, Phillips Lytle LLP
- Daniel Hagen, market sales leader, Stark Tech
- Stephen Hotz, founder and CEO, LED Energy Solutions, LLC
- Gary Marchiori, President - EnergyMark
- Daniel Montante, co-founder and president, Montante Solar

## FEDERAL LAW IMPLICATIONS

The rollback of the inflation reduction incentives in the recent tax and spending bill are causing a sense of urgency for NOCO, Casciano said. Incentives around residential projects close at the end of the year and mid-2026 for commercial.

NOCO in recent years transitioned from retail gasoline sales to energy services along 17 lines of business including supplying home heating oil and natural gas, performing home energy assessments and installing insulation.

## THE EXPERTS:



**MICHAEL CASCIANO**  
President and COO  
NOCO LLC

Michael Casciano serves as president and chief operating officer of NOCO, a leading full-service energy company serving customers across Upstate New York.

Under his leadership, NOCO has evolved into a diversified provider of innovative energy solutions for residential and commercial customers, driving sustainability and fostering industry innovation. Mike has been instrumental in scaling NOCO's operations, and he remains committed to pursuing new opportunities for growth, ensuring NOCO continues to adapt to market demands and exceed customer expectations.

With more than 30 years of corporate operations experience, prior to becoming NOCO president in 2024, he served as the company's chief operating officer starting in 2022. He previously worked with NOCO in a consultancy role as managing partner of Casciano Consulting Group, LLC, a firm he founded in 2008. Earlier in his career, Mike held leadership positions at United Parcel Service and Tops Markets.

Mike holds a M.B.A. from St. Bonaventure University.



**DAVID FLYNN**  
Partner  
Phillips Lytle LLP

David P. Flynn is a partner at Phillips Lytle and co-leader of the firm's Energy and Renewables Industry Team. He is also leader of the firm's Environmental Law Practice and a member of the firm's Cryptocurrency and Blockchain Practice Team and Data Center Practice Team. His practice is concentrated in the areas of energy, environmental law and emerging technologies. David advises clients on business development issues and the regulation of energy before state and federal authorities. He also advises clients on the development and siting of renewable energy facilities, licensing of hydropower projects, hydrogen projects and energy storage facilities. David represents data center owners and operators and cryptocurrency firms on data center siting, regulatory and energy procurement-related matters. He regularly speaks on energy topics across New York State and has strong connections with major energy and energy-related organizations. He was recognized in City & State New York's Trailblazers in Clean Energy in 2024 and 2025, named to City & State New York's Energy & Environment Power 100 list for three consecutive years and has been named a Leading Lawyer in Chambers USA for the past 16 years.



**DANIEL HAGEN**  
Market Sales Leader  
Stark Tech

Dan Hagen is a Market Sales Leader with over 20 years of experience driving revenue growth and leading sales teams in the building technologies space. Based in Western NY, Dan is known for his strategic vision, strong partner relationships, and ability to identify market trends to unlock new business opportunities. He excels in developing actionable sales strategies, implementing key performance indicators, and managing budgets to optimize ROI. His technical background includes managing complex HVAC controls and security projects, coordinating engineering teams, and ensuring systems meet the highest standards through quality control and verification. Dan holds a Bachelor of Science from the University at Buffalo and is OSHA 30-hour certified, reinforcing his dedication to safety and operational excellence. Known for his collaborative approach and results-driven mindset, Dan continues to be a trusted partner in the building technologies industry.



**STEPHEN HOTZ**  
Founder and CEO  
LED Energy Solutions, LLC

Stephen Hotz is a visionary executive with more than 25 years of leadership across the energy, healthcare, and hospitality industries. As CEO of LED Energy Solutions LLC, he has led the company to the forefront of the zero net energy movement, delivering advanced solutions in LED lighting, HVAC services, solar, EV infrastructure, Geothermal, and wind technologies. Steve is known for his data-driven leadership and commitment to trust, accountability, and culture—building high-performing teams that deliver measurable, lasting impact.

Before entering the energy space, Steve held senior operational roles in healthcare and hospitality. He earned a degree in Hospitality Management from Mercyhurst University.

An engaged member of the Amherst Chamber of Commerce, B.O.M.A., and the Sustainable Business Roundtable, Steve also previously led a BNI chapter to record growth. His strategic mindset and purpose-driven leadership continue to shape the future of sustainable innovation while creating value for organizations and communities alike.



**GARY MARCHIORI**  
President  
EnergyMark

Gary Marchiori is the founder and President of EnergyMark, an independent energy services company based in Williamsville, NY. Since starting the company in 2002, he has grown EnergyMark into a trusted supplier of electricity, natural gas, and renewable energy. The company offers solutions such as community solar and renewable natural gas from local dairy farms, and has recently expanded into a national energy consulting firm serving commercial and industrial clients across the country.

Gary's experience in the energy industry dates back to before the deregulation of New York State's energy markets. Over the years, he has held leadership roles at Constellation NewEnergy, NOCO Energy Marketing, and Texaco Natural Gas, working closely with businesses to manage energy costs and strategy in both regulated and competitive markets.

He currently serves as Vice President of the Independent Oil and Gas Association of New York (IOGA) and is an active member of the National Energy Marketers Association (NEM).

A resident of Western New York since 1983, Gary lives in Williamsville with his wife Patricia. He remains active in the business community through memberships in more than 11 local Chambers of Commerce and participation in Clean Communities of Western New York.



**DANIEL MONTANTE**  
Co-founder and President  
Montante Solar

Daniel Montante is the President and co-founder of Montante Solar. A veteran of the renewable energy industry, Daniel has overseen the company's rapid growth, solidifying its position as a key player in the New York solar market. Daniel is responsible for leading the company and providing a clear strategic direction. He has assembled a top-tier team of engineering, construction, and finance professionals who have built some of the most noteworthy solar projects in New York.

Daniel is also President of the New York Solar Energy Industries Association (NYSEIA), the only statewide membership and trade association dedicated solely to advancing solar energy in New York State. He also serves on the Board of Directors at Artpark & Company and is Vice President of the Torn Space Theater.







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**DANIEL MONTANTE**

Montante Solar



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**GARY MARCHIORI**

EnergyMark



“Our purpose is to optimize energy and reduce costs,” Casciano said. “We all know that utility rates have gone up and the forecast going forward is not bright. We’re talking to our customers about that and we’re just trying to share with them the timeline they should not miss out on this opportunity to take advantage of these incentives.

He said he is hopeful that the idea of getting \$8,000 or \$9,000 off the cost of a project will get hesitant customers to act within the timelines.

Flynn, co-leader of Phillips Lytle’s Energy and Renewables Industry Team, added that the tight deadlines likely will stress the supply-chain. He said several Phillips Lytle clients are trying to bring in materials from overseas, so they don’t get caught as the supply chain tightens up here.

Phillips Lytle began its energy practice 10 years ago working on relicensing, energy storage, renewable energy and hydrogen projects, energy development and energy compliance.

“We’re working with our clients to try and figure out implementation plans,” Flynn said. “Some are ready to go, and they’ll have no problem, but if they’re further up the pipeline in terms of local approvals those timelines can get compressed very quickly.”

On the positive side, the tax and spending bill offers significant tax credits for battery energy storage that will continue for a number of years, Montante said. He gave credit to New York State for embracing storage as one part of the solution of the state’s energy future. Montante Solar builds commercial and industrial scale solar projects and energy storage products

across New York and Illinois.

Flynn believes the concern of the bill is overrated in terms of its long-haul effects.

“There’s no question it’s going to have some near and midterm effects, but I think the dynamics long term continue to be strong for looking at alternative energy supply management systems,” Flynn said.

### DEMAND, COST INCREASES

The increased demand for power will prompt public utilities to ask for increases in rates to meet the demand and service needs.

Public utilities are asking for a significant rate increase that will support infrastructure and the diversified power sources, substations and transmission necessary to support movement from a hundred sources of supply, Marchiori said.

To project growth in the industrial sector, the market needs to align with the state’s current and future energy usage. For example, energy costs are critical to data centers in terms of their ability to be competitive regionally and globally, Flynn said.

“A lot of the things that we’re doing on the policy side are driving costs up and not necessarily doing it in a way that can help promote economic development,” Flynn said. “If costs just keep going up and up and up, you’re

going to price people out of the market or they’re going to be priced out of their global market or even regional market, so we need to bring the policies particularly at the state level, more into alignment with economic development so that it can become a sustainable paradigm where we’ve got economic growth offsetting increased energy cost and the energy is being used to drive economic development. We’re not seeing much of that. Ultimately we need to reposition some of our policies.”

Flynn said looking at current residential electric bills, half of the delivery costs are fees and system benefit charges, taxes and other costs. Is that driving value to the consumer?

“There are a lot of people at the state level who are driven by other agenda items which are very legitimate, I strongly support more renewable energy,” Flynn said, “but how do you position it, how do you implement it in a way that you see the benefit.”

### LED LIGHTING

Buffalo’s LED adoption rate trails significantly behind national averages.

Hotz said there are several contributing factors to the situation: aging infrastructure, complex permitting processes and lack of awareness surrounding incentives among them. However, rising energy costs and the expectations around environmental social and governance, commonly referred to as ESG, are beginning to



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Stark Tech



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**STEPHEN HOTZ**  
LED Energy Solutions, LLC

trigger some momentum, he said.

His company sees a "major acceleration over the next five years" in the private sector but especially in the public sector with multifamily and industrial facilities.

"It's going to be driven by great cost reductions, sustainability mandates as

they continue to be introduced -- you know that's going to play a role with compliance -- and local leadership as well depending on the scenario," Hotz said. "We're bullish on it. It's just a matter of trust with our customers and educating them so that they feel very comfortable in the process and that we're going to deliver on what we tell them."

There is a bit of cynicism given that energy savings promised with the phase-out of fluorescent lighting 20 years ago were overstated.

"People remember that and they're very careful about what you do put in front of them," Hotz said. "They want to make sure that we're going to deliver on energy savings because quite frankly it's the tip of the iceberg for us. We want to build trust and loyalty and then they call us for the next energy-efficient project."

The company offers a toolkit of net-zero options of which lighting is the first step, Hotz said. Energy solutions are part of the next chapter of applications that are most beneficial for that company. The company matches those solutions with the customer's current needs whether it is solar or geothermal infrastructure.

"We are certainly agnostic to that approach," Hotz said. "Every company has different priorities depending on their sustainability goals. Our integrated

approach enables us to build scalable sustainability. That is what we're after."

Casciano agreed that education is critical. Businesses that are informed about the incentives for the state or the service benefits charge, for example, will have the advantage over their competition, he said.

At NOCO, education extends to its field personnel who are the face of the company and who can calculate energy savings for a customer to help them make their decision.

"This is about really getting the message out," Casciano said. "People don't understand energy, where it comes from, what the opportunities are, so the education to me has to be in the forefront."

#### PARTNERSHIPS

Stark Tech is a sustainability solutions provider based in Amherst with offices in six states on the East Coast. The company considers itself a sustainability

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partner with its customers working together to reduce energy and increase efficiency and sustainability, Hagen said.

The company can use its own headquarters as a model for others.

Its headquarters, Stark Tech's Innovation Center, 2100 Wehrle Drive, was built in 2023 designed to meet the international WELL Building standards, the first certification process to focus on the health and wellness of building occupants, and LEED standards to meet high standards of sustainability such as energy and water efficiency, materials and indoor environmental quality.

The building's features were included to intentionally serve as a showcase for customers that similarly want to achieve energy efficiency, electrification, and indoor air quality goals.

Hagen said Stark Tech recently helped a customer by including data analytics in the company's existing building control system and found areas of operational inefficiencies that Stark

Tech was able to correct. The company presented the changes, updates and resulting energy savings to its local energy utility.

"They were able to get a \$500,000 credit check written directly to them that they were able to use for additional measures," Hagen said. "There are stories like that across our customer base."

Stark Tech's investment in its headquarters also exemplifies the company's core values, providing Stark Tech employees with an environment that fosters innovation, which is a source of pride, Hagen said.

"The WELL part of it is focused on thermal comfort," he said. "It drives better efficiencies from your employees, lowering your cost and getting better production out of the workforce."

### ENERGY STORAGE

Energy storage is seen as a key to a renewable future, but there have been

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**MICHAEL CASCIANO**  
NOCO LLC



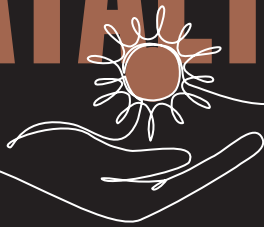
delays in widespread deployment of the needed battery systems across the state.

Storage comes into play, for example, during the hot summer days when so-called peaker power plants kick in to support the high demand when New Yorkers fire up their air conditioners. The role that energy storage plays is basically removing those super high

peaks that necessitate the peaker plants, Montante said.

Energy storage will come into play in a very significant way in the coming years, and the recent federal tax and spending bill provides the durability of the energy storage markets across the country. But there are challenges in New York, Montante said. One is

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**DAVID FLYNN**  
Phillips Lytle LLP



siting the projects and the municipal permitting processes involved. It is also unknown how quickly and efficiently utilities can absorb the projects.

Energy storage will play a critical role as artificial intelligence data centers are developed. The redundancy and the ability of the grid will be tested

whether it’s a natural disaster or extreme demand, Flynn said.

“Having energy storage can ensure not just the availability of energy but the energy quality, which is critical to a number of higher tech applications including AI data centers,” Flynn said. “That’s another important reason for

New York to encourage and facilitate proper deployment of energy storage facilities across the state.”

#### CLCPA

The panelists agreed that goals of the state’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act are ambitious and unachievable by the set deadlines. The goals involve reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 85% by 2050, achieving 70% renewable energy in the electricity sector by 2030 and transition to 100% zero-emission electricity generation by 2040.

The deadlines need to be readjusted to ensure there is a place for multiple sources of energy, solar, wind and nuclear, among them, Flynn said.

Marchiori believes a subgroup that is implementing the CLCPA is “quietly pushing back their goals, and that’s a good thing because I don’t think it’s consumer focused whatsoever. They’re not looking at the inability to pay some of these prices,” he said.

Utilities don’t make money on the supply side of energy, so the companies need to increase prices on delivery and consumers are being forced into buying all-electric homes. Even with heat pumps, the costs will be four to seven times more expensive, he said.

There is no doubt that demand will increase tremendously what with the development of data centers and chip manufacturing in the offing, Marchiori said.

“A lot of these things that we’re doing to drive our larger economy are very reliant on electric energy,” he said. “We’re going to see a continued significant load growth that we’re going to have to match. We’ve got to be reasonable in terms of how we achieve our climate goals, and that there should be those goals longer term, but we also can’t absolutely hamstring ourselves with decisions to just reach a goal without understanding what the implications are in a broader sense.”

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