

Talk CNY- Transcript for S1E8

Andrew Fish 0:06

CenterState CEO is Central New York's leading business leadership and economic development organization committed to creating a region where businesses thrive and all people prosper. Welcome to CenterState CEO's semi monthly podcast, Talk CNY presented by NBT Bank.

Kate Hammer 0:22

Through this series CenterState CEO shares the latest news and information on topics ranging from community and workforce development to policy and innovation. You'll get an inside look at the people, projects and planning moving Central New York forward. Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for new episode reminders every other Wednesday.

Andrew Fish 0:42

This month, we will explore the policy initiatives CenterState CEO leads across our region.

Maria Hudson 0:48

I think it's interesting that what we're seeing is youth in particular being very excited about nuclear energy. They are definitely more afraid of climate change than they are of splitting atoms. And that's great news for Constellation because we are producing 47% of the state's clean energy with these nuclear assets.

Andrew Fish 1:03

Maria Hudson, Government Affairs Manager at Constellation, joins us today to talk about the state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act or CLCPA, and how Constellation has a tremendous role in supporting these ambitious goals through energy generation and innovation. I'm Andrew Fish, Senior Vice President of Member and Business Experience at CenterState CEO.

Kate Hammer 1:24

I'm Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. We are your hosts for Talk CNY. Maria, thank you so much for joining us today.

Maria Hudson 1:32

Yeah, thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

Kate Hammer 1:35

Well, before we jump in on this important topic, I do want to take a moment to level set our understanding of the CLCPA. And so for those who maybe aren't as familiar, the CLCPA outlines the state's ambitious goal to have 70% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and all the state's electricity come from carbon free sources by 2040.

Andrew Fish 1:57

Right. So what that means is some businesses will need to dramatically adapt their operations to meet these goals and also create some really unique economic opportunities for Central New York, specifically. So because of that potential impact something here at CenterState that we're really tracking, and we're really excited to have you here today to talk about all of this.

Maria Hudson 2:14

Thanks. Yeah.

Kate Hammer 2:15

Maria, could you tell us a little bit about yourself and about your company, Constellation?

Maria Hudson 2:19

Yeah, absolutely. So, Maria Hudson, born and raised here in Syracuse, went to school for undergrad Plattsburgh State and then in Ithaca College for grad school was lucky enough to land a job with the nuclear power plants in New York, where I have been for almost 20 years. So really an amazing opportunity being right here in my community working for this amazing company. So speaking of the company, Constellation, it's a relatively new company. We spun off from Exelon back in February of 2022. Constellation is the nation's largest producer of emissions free electricity. It's something we are super proud of. And what people know us for I think locally really is the nuclear power plants, they steal the show because they're incredibly cool. So we have the Nine Mile point Unit One and Unit Two. So we right next door is the Fitzpatrick Plant, that's a single unit. And then we also have a single reactor out in Ginna, in a nuclear power plant just outside of Rochester, that actually sits in a super cool apple orchard. And this time of the year with the flowers.

Andrew Fish 3:16

Oh, yeah, sure.

Maria Hudson 3:17

You know, it's a great place to be. So these nuclear plants are really incredible. They provide 47% of the state's clean energy. So when you talk about CLCPA, and the impact, you know, these plants are way up there. One thing that people might not know about constellation is we do have a very strong retail business. We provide energy products and services to over 2

million homes and businesses. And in fact, we serve 75% of the Fortune 100. So it's a strong business. And we talk about CLCPA and businesses maybe needing to reevaluate their own operational environmental goals, you know, Constellations right there. That's another way that we are engaging in the CLCPA, when our clients call us and they need help, we are there for innovative solutions, helping them reach their own climate and energy goals.

Andrew Fish 4:02

That's fantastic. So it's interesting because you think about the CLCPA. And you know, the state's goals and how everyone is trying to help meet those, obviously, nuclear is a big part of that. But you also as a company are trying to move that needle and become even cleaner in some of those operations. And it's really amazing, because I know that you guys are doing some innovative stuff with hydrogen technology right now. And I know it's new and it's just in its beginning process. But what can you tell us about that?

Maria Hudson 4:28

Yeah, so I think it was 2021 when the Department of Energy gave constellation and several more partners of grant a \$5.8 million grant to pioneer research at Nine Mile Point Nuclear Station. Can hydrogen be produced from clean nuclear energy? Historically, it's been produced using fossil fuels so namely natural gas. So we were able to with our partners build this electrolyzer at Nine Mile Point. And what the electrolyzer does, it's a one megawatt, first of its kind in the nation, so cool, and it separates hydrogen and oxygen from water. So very common, you know, hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe. So these are just common, you know, everyday things that we are separating the hydrogen, we are storing it, and we're using it for our own internal purposes. So in a nuclear power plant, we use hydrogen to cool some of our equipment. So not having to truck this hydrogen in from fossil made sources using a fossil powered truck. It does help constellation meet its own climate objectives. We're trying to reduce our carbon emission operationally by 100% by 2040. So this is really playing a big role for us right now. And CenterState that you guys were there in September, when we had an event to kind of celebrate our progress. So we had all of our state partners, county partners, it was a community turnout that was amazing. That's where I learned something pretty cool, I should have known it but I didn't, Phil Church, Oswego County Administrator, talked about how the atomic symbol is in the center of the Oswego County emblem.

Andrew Fish 5:55

Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

Maria Hudson 5:57

And that really just, you know, talks about our relationship with the community and how integral these plants are to our counties where we where we operate.

Andrew Fish 6:04

That's amazing.

Maria Hudson 6:05

Yeah.

Andrew Fish 6:05

First in the nation with hydrogen.

Maria Hudson 6:07

Absolutely.

Andrew Fish 6:07

Oswego County with the emblem, I love that.

Kate Hammer 6:09

Yeah. And these plants have a long history and Oswego County. And mean a lot to the entire region. Can you tell us a little bit more about your economic impact in the areas?

Maria Hudson 6:18

Yeah, I mean, the economic impact for these plants is truly impressive. So we are, you know, mostly in a rural community and Oswego and Wayne County. We are among the largest taxpayers in these communities. In fact, the three nuclear power plants combined are about \$140 million in state and local taxes. So really a huge impact. And you know, that's just the tax dollars. When we look at the jobs between the three plants, we have about 2,000 jobs, these are full time direct jobs, they're well paying, you know, highly technical positions. And then we've got the indirect jobs, which is truly impressive, about 20,000 indirect. So when I talk about indirect, you know, all of the goods and services that those plants need to continue to operate on, we rely on, you know, companies across the state and country for that. One of the most visible aspects I think of our indirect is our refueling outages. So every 12 to 18 months, we shut the plants down to refuel. It's exactly like it sounds. We're shuffling fuel in the reactor, we're putting new fuel in. And we are completing 1000s of maintenance activities to make sure that these plants can operate reliably. We call it breaker breaker so startup to shut down. We want these plants to stay online. We do that by bringing in up to a couple 1000 supplemental workers during this temporary time. So these workers are packing hotels, they're packing restaurants, they're shopping, you know, on their day off, they're visiting the Port Authority, you know, they're getting hotdogs at Rudy's there, when it's open, you know, they're doing all the cool things, right. And so we hear a lot from how much that means to small businesses and the

community. Not a lot of people are going to actually go in like April or November. So this is a traditionally slow time for small businesses. And it's nice that we can give them this economic boost with refueling outage.

Andrew Fish 7:54

You know, for the last six years, we've had a tremendous partnership and have been helping to operate the Greater Oswego Fulton chamber and you know, the first couple of years, I would hear about the outages, right? And they're like, oh, it's an outage. And I was like, isn't that a bad thing? Like, things are out, like, I view that as no power, but then like, I would come up there and meet with our staff up there. And I would see like the restaurants are full, the hotels are full. I was like, "Wow, this has a tremendous impact on the region there". But I remember a time not too long ago, where, you know, there was some real concern around the future and the viability of the plans. 2016. That was an interesting time. It was my first year here at CenterState. And I remember how involved we were in that. But tell us a little bit about what the plants and the community went through and how that impacted everything.

Maria Hudson 8:35

Yeah, that's right. You know, it seems like a long time ago now, but around 2016, the future of the plants was in jeopardy. I think that we're really fortunate to live in New York State and especially Central New York, where climate is valued, the nuclear energy assets are valued. Or maybe I wouldn't be here today if talking about this at all. Because what happened is, you know, when the community got word that the plants were in jeopardy, everybody rallied, you know, it was just such an impressive effort. To see it firsthand, I mean, I have to say it was truly moving. Upstate Energy Jobs, so a coalition of like minded, mostly small businesses in Oswego, you know, rallied for us. CenterState was right there. We have Oswego County, Wayne County Organized Labor, I mean, huge effort there, they were a tremendous support to us. So we packed public meetings. There was marching bands. Yeah, you know, there was energy everywhere. The community felt so passionately about it. One of my favorites was when I saw the handmade posters, and one of the posters had, you know, cotton balls, you know, for the steam coming out of the cooling tower. And, you know, people put some effort into that, right. And I think that the key thing there is, you know, everybody knows somebody, right, who works at a plant. So we've got the support, the plants had been there for generations, and people understand the technology, they do understand the what's coming out of that cooling tower is just clean steam. So I think they're comfortable with the technology and they understand the impact that we have on the community. So all of that support, you know, you flash forward to today. And here we are producing 47% of the state's clean energy, preventing 16 million tons of carbon dioxide. I love those facts. Yeah, keep repeating. Yeah. And so you Here we are. And we're so lucky to have this community behind us. And we understand that we know that and we are

doing our best as a corporate citizen to give back. You know, our employees in particular take that to heart, they are just so ingrained in the fabric of the communities, their coaches, their scout leaders, their mentors, and they're also just financially extremely generous.

Andrew Fish 10:16

We'll be right back to hear more, especially about how nuclear energy is being embraced more now more than ever, and Constellation's investing heavily in central New York. But first, here's a note from Talk CNY's presenting sponsor NBT Bank.

NBT Bank Sponsor 10:29

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Kate Hammer 11:00

Continuing this conversation, as you partner with the state to increase clean energy generation, what is the sentiment? How are leaders feeling?

Maria Hudson 11:07

Yeah, I mean, from struggling to keep the plants alive, the conversation, we just had the questions, the uncertainty to now providing 47% of the state's clean energy and being a key partner, I believe in the CLCPA, I think that there's a lot of optimism, there's a lot of hope for the future among both leaders and the employees. And Constellation certainly is making significant investments in these plants, which I hope will keep them operating for years to come. I talked about the refueling outages and all the jobs. But in the investment side of that constellation has invested \$100 million, just this spring between outages in New York state. So a tremendous investment, we want to keep these plants reliable. And we're doing that I mean, what you'll see beyond that investment is workforce development, which I know is a hot topic for everybody. But we are working with schools, we're working with trades, organized labor, we want to make sure that we are really, you know, facilitating the pipeline for highly qualified nuclear professionals going forward. By the time this podcast airs, one of the cool things that we'll be announcing is a partnership with SkillsUSA. You know, they are creating access to jobs for people maybe who never thought about energy or never thought about trades, you know, creating that access is really what's going to be key to get underserved populations in these roles. And that's what we're doing. And to add on to that. So next week, we're going to be the Mexico School District. So locally, BOCES is

really, you know, the connection to bring this all together. Yeah. And we've all seen on social media college signing, right, so and so is going here, there, but we're gonna start doing that with these kids who are committing to this skills program. I think it's amazing. I think it's like flipping the dynamic. And you don't have to go to college. You know, there's really great, high paying technical jobs right here. So let's celebrate that. You know, let's sign these kids. Let's make them feel special. And kind of just, you know, flip the script on, you know, how it's always looked before. I love that. So yeah, we're really excited about next week.

Kate Hammer 12:51

Yeah, I can't wait to see that. That sounds wonderful.

Andrew Fish 12:53

So it sounds like leadership's full of enthusiasm, a lot of momentum, a lot of great things. One last thing I wanted to talk about with you today is we're really seeing a shift as it relates to nuclear energy globally, right? I mean, this is something where there's a lot of discussion, a lot of talking a lot of dynamics that are shifting that maybe we saw previously weren't as great, but now people are really leaning in.

Maria Hudson 13:17

Yeah, absolutely. It's amazing. Nuclear is really having a moment, I think, you know, the young people, they are way more afraid of climate change as they are splitting atoms, you know, they see nuclear as a path forward a solution to climate change. And I think the sentiment is spreading, the Gallup poll was released last week, and it showed that Americans 55% are either strongly in favor or in favor of nuclear. Oh, wow. Yeah. I mean, those are numbers we haven't seen in over a decade. Sure. So I was totally encouraged by that. And just really enthusiastic.

Andrew Fish 13:46

Amazing, you know, it really seems like we're positioned well, in this region, with Constellation with the state's clean energy goals, critical partner. I mean, it seems to me like you know, the state would have a really hard time achieving these goals without constellation as a partner in all of this with the 47% of the state's clean energy being produced there. So really great to have this conversation with you today, Maria, and hopefully our listeners are, are as jazzed about nuclear energy and what it means for us in Central New York as we are.

Maria Hudson 13:46

Thank you so much for having me. I'll talk about nuclear all day. Appreciate it.

Kate Hammer 14:10

Thank you. Join us in two weeks as we talk to CenterState CEO's, Kevin Schwab, about the CLCPA and other policies and advocacy our work organization is engaged in.

Andrew Fish 14:28

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Kate Hammer 14:56

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