OHIO COMMON GROUND RESEARCH CENTER

CANDIDATE SNAPSHOT

Fact-Checking Vivek Ramaswamy's Ohio Data Center Pledge in “Plain Language”

What the pledge promises, claim by claim, and what would actually have to happen for each promise to work

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What This Snapshot Covers

On August 6, 2026, Vivek Ramaswamy published a detailed pledge describing how he would handle Ohio's data-center boom as governor. Ohio Common Ground reviewed six of the pledge's major claims — the free-electricity proposal, the property-tax rebate, the environmental and siting conditions, the day-one executive order, the ratepayer-protection priority claim, and the framing statistics the pledge opens with — against Ohio law, federal law, and the public record.

This Snapshot does not evaluate whether the pledge's goals are good policy. It documents what each claim says, what is independently verifiable, and what would have to happen — legally and practically — for each promise to work as written.

1. “Free electricity” for people near data centers

The promise: Pair a data center with its own power plant. Sell the data center only the power it needs, and give the leftover power free to nearby homes, inside a “benefit zone.” The pledge states that 100 megawatts of surplus could power 75,000–100,000 homes.

What checks out: That figure holds up. Based on U.S. Energy Information Administration data and a comparable Congressional Research Service estimate, 100 megawatts of continuous output is roughly equivalent to the average annual electricity use of 80,000 to 85,000 households.

What's harder than it sounds: Electricity that reaches the shared regional grid — Ohio is part of the PJM Interconnection — is federally regulated wholesale power. It is scheduled and settled across the regional pool, not physically traced to specific nearby homes. A state legislature or governor cannot simply order that power to flow into a defined “free zone.” Under the Federal Power Act, wholesale sales and interstate transmission are federal, not state, authority.

The pledge does not say whether the household benefit would be structured as an allocation of wholesale power (which raises federal preemption questions) or as a data-center-funded rebate paid directly to residents (which is legally simpler but still needs enabling state legislation, utility and regulatory implementation, and defined eligibility rules).

Any “surplus” also isn't fixed. Data centers typically draw more power over time as they build out, so the amount of power “left over” for residents would tend to shrink the longer a facility operates.

Bottom line: *The math behind the 100-megawatt figure is accurate. The delivery mechanism is described at the level of an idea, not a plan a utility or regulator could implement as written.*

2. Lower property taxes for homeowners near data centers

The promise: Stop giving new data centers property-tax abatements, require them to pay their property taxes in full, and use that revenue to directly fund property-tax rebates for nearby homeowners — without cutting funding for local police, schools, or fire departments.

What checks out: Ohio data centers do receive substantial local property-tax abatements — commonly 65 to 100 percent off for 15 to 30 years, granted through Community Reinvestment Areas and Enterprise Zones. Barring future data centers from these programs is within the state legislature's authority.

What's harder than it sounds: Property tax is local revenue, and roughly 60 percent of it typically funds school districts. The same dollar of tax revenue cannot simultaneously fund the local governments and schools that levy it and be diverted to a separate homeowner rebate — not without another funding source to fill the gap, and the pledge does not name one.

The plan also doesn't reach Ohio's largest data-center incentive. The state's biggest single tax break for data centers is a separate sales-and-use tax exemption — worth roughly $722 million in 2024 — which this property-tax proposal would not affect. And a data center's computer equipment already isn't subject to property tax in Ohio regardless of any abatement, so “full payment” applies only to land, buildings, and site improvements.

A separate effort to eliminate Ohio's real-property tax entirely is headed toward the November 2027 ballot. If it passes, it will eliminate the very revenue stream this rebate plan depends on — a conflict the pledge does not address.

Bottom line: *Ending future tax abatements is achievable through state legislation. Turning that revenue into homeowner rebates without reducing money available to schools and local services and reconciling the plan with the state's largest data-center tax break and a pending property-tax ballot measure, are gaps the pledge leaves open.*

3. Stronger environmental rules and building on old industrial land instead of farmland

The promise: Require data centers to follow all air and water quality standards “without exception,” recycle water using the best available technology, discharge water “just as clean” as when it was taken in, and favor brownfields (former industrial sites) over farmland for new construction.

What checks out: A real, data-center-specific streamlined water-permit proposal (Ohio EPA's draft general NPDES permit, OHD000001) was under consideration in 2025–26 and critics called it preferential treatment. Favoring brownfields over farmland is realistic — Ohio has already built data centers on former industrial sites, and the state's Brownfield Remediation Program has funded hundreds of redevelopment projects.

What's harder than it sounds: Ohio EPA withdrew the streamlined water-permit proposal on July 21, 2026, after roughly 7,000 public comments, and returned to individual permitting — so the specific concern this part of the pledge appears to respond to has already been resolved a different way. No comparable special exemption from air-quality standards for data centers was found; they follow the same rules as other industries.

“Just as clean as when it came in” is not an existing pollution standard — it would need to be written from scratch, including which pollutants, at what levels, and how to handle water lost to evaporation, which current standards don't address, and which is often the larger water concern.

Where a data center is actually built is mostly a local zoning decision, made by cities, counties, and townships — not something a governor can direct on their own, though the state can offer incentives that steer developers toward brownfields.

Bottom line: *The environmental goals are mostly reasonable in concept, but several would require new rules written from the ground up, and the specific water-permitting issue that likely prompted this section has already been withdrawn by Ohio EPA.*

4. Stopping new data centers on day one with an executive order

The promise: On his first day as governor, issue an executive order immediately halting approval of any new data-center project in Ohio until new legislation takes effect.

This is the pledge's most significant legal problem: A governor can absolutely sign an executive order on day one — nothing prevents that. But an executive order can only use authority the executive branch already has; it can't create new legal power on its own.

What's harder than it sounds: There is no single statewide “data center approval” for a governor to pause. A project typically clears several separate approvals — local zoning boards, Ohio EPA permits, utility regulators, and, for some projects, the state's Power Siting Board — most of which operate under statutory criteria a governor cannot simply override. Local zoning in particular is controlled by municipalities and townships, not the governor.

The clearest real-world comparison: in May 2026, Ohio's sitting governor paused new applications to the state's discretionary data-center sales-tax exemption program — a real and immediate step, but one that froze a single financial incentive, not construction itself. The governor's office described it explicitly as “not a data center ban.”

The pledge also ties the order's end date to new legislation passing — something a governor cannot guarantee the legislature will do, and even after passage, Ohio law typically takes effect 90 days after filing unless passed as emergency legislation.

Bottom line: *A governor could immediately freeze one specific state incentive program on day one. Stopping all new data-center approvals statewide would require the legislature to pass a new law defining what's paused, for how long, and for whom — something an executive order alone cannot do.*

5. Did Ramaswamy call for protecting ratepayers before Amy Acton did?

The promise: The pledge states that Ramaswamy's Democratic opponent, Amy Acton, “recently announced that data centers must not contribute to higher electric bills for ratepayers,” a position he says he “advocated for in early 2025, long before she started parroting the same.”

What checks out: Acton did announce that data centers should cover their own added utility costs rather than shift them to other customers, as part of her July 27, 2026 policy rollout. Ramaswamy was also publicly discussing Ohio's data-center boom as early as March 2025.

What's harder than it sounds: Those early-2025 statements, reviewed for this Snapshot, show Ramaswamy calling for more electricity generation to keep up with data-center demand — not specifically arguing that data centers must cover their own added costs so other ratepayers' bills don't rise. Those are related but different arguments, and the specific ratepayer-protection position wasn't found in his documented early-2025 statements.

The underlying idea — that data centers should pay their own way rather than shifting costs to other customers — didn't originate with either candidate. Ohio utility regulators were already developing this principle in a 2024 case brought by AEP Ohio, which resulted in a new data-center rate structure approved in July 2025, before either campaign's statements on the subject.

Bottom line: *Ramaswamy was talking about data centers publicly before Acton's July 2026 announcement. Whether his opponent's specific ratepayer-protection policy was copied from him isn't something the public record supports either way — and the underlying idea predates both campaigns.*

6. Is this really Ohioans' #2 concern, and is the industry really booming?

The promise: The pledge opens by describing data-center growth as “a top concern I hear from Ohioans across our state — second only to property taxes,” states that Ohio already has “hundreds” of data centers, and says construction is “accelerating.”

What checks out: Ohio does have more than 200 data centers by most current counts, so “hundreds” is accurate. The industry is expanding rapidly — tens of billions of dollars in new investment are planned and dozens more facilities are in the pipeline. Public concern about rising bills, noise, environmental effects, and community benefit is real and well documented in polling and public testimony.

What's harder than it sounds: No poll reviewed for this Snapshot ranks data centers as Ohioans' literal second-highest concern behind property taxes specifically. A February 2026 survey found strong concern about data centers and energy costs generally — 82% of voters agreed AI computing and data centers are driving up household energy costs — but the same survey's top-ranked concerns were inflation, health-insurance costs, taxes generally, and energy costs, not a specific property-tax-then-data-centers ranking.

Literally “accelerating” (an increasing rate of construction) would require a time series of construction starts or completions to demonstrate; the available figures show a large and growing pipeline, which supports “rapid expansion” more precisely than “acceleration.”

Bottom line: *The scale and pace of data-center growth in Ohio is real and well supported. The specific claim that data centers rank as Ohioans' #2 concern, behind property taxes, is framed as the candidate's own experience and isn't something available polling independently confirms.*

So, Does the Plan Hold Up?

The pledge identifies frustrations that show up consistently in Ohio polling and public testimony: rising electric bills, large tax breaks for major corporations, and pressure on farmland. Several of its underlying ideas — ending future tax abatements, favoring brownfields over farmland, requiring data centers to cover their own grid costs — are realistic and have some precedent in Ohio law or regulatory practice.

A pattern recurs across nearly every claim examined here: the stated goals are considerably more developed than the mechanics for achieving them. “Free electricity,” a homeowner property-tax rebate, water discharged “just as clean” as it arrived, and a day-one construction freeze each sound straightforward as stated. Once the questions become who pays, who has legal authority, and exactly how the program would operate, the pledge does not supply those answers.

This Snapshot does not conclude that the underlying ideas are good or bad policy — only that, as written, most of them describe policy objectives that would still need to be built out through legislation and rulemaking, rather than programs Ohio could put into effect as stated.

How OCG Prepares Fact-Check Snapshots

- Each claim is checked against primary sources: statutes, court decisions, agency filings, government data, and the pledge's own text.
- Direct claims are separated from framing and characterization; each is assessed on its own terms.
- Where a claim is accurate, but its implementation faces legal or practical barriers, this Snapshot states both the accurate part and the barrier — rather than reducing the claim to a single true/false rating.
- Claims that cannot be independently verified from available sources are identified as such, not presented as confirmed or refuted.
- OCG does not score, rank, or endorse candidates, officials, or policy proposals in its Research Center publications.

Revision History

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Sources

Primary

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- Ohio Constitution, Articles II, III, and XVIII.
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