



Photo by Becca Humann

# Blocking the Sun

## Utilities and Fossil Fuel Interests Work to Undermine American Solar Power

*Solar energy is clean, popular and cost-effective. But electric utilities and fossil fuel front groups are using their power and influence to slow the growth of solar energy across America.*

### Solar Energy Is Popular and Growing Quickly

Americans are united in support of solar energy. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center poll, 89 percent of Americans – including 83 percent of conservative Republicans – favor expanding solar power in the U.S. Today, there is enough solar energy in the U.S. to power one in 14 homes. And in 2017 alone, solar generation averted approximately 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide pollution, equivalent to taking nearly 12 million passenger vehicles off the road.



**AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY**



### A National Network of Industry Front Groups Are Fighting Rooftop Solar

Despite widespread public support, powerful interests continue to fight the solar boom. A national network of fossil fuel interests and industry front groups are organizing behind the scenes, using similar tactics in state after state to attack key solar policies:

- The **Edison Electric Institute**, which represents U.S. electric utilities, mobilized utilities against rooftop solar in 2012, and has since funded and provided policy support to a wide range of anti-solar efforts.
- The **American Legislative Exchange Council** provides utility and fossil fuel interests with access to state lawmakers, drafting model anti-solar legislation that can be replicated in multiple states.
- The **Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA)** is a front group for the utility and fossil fuel industry, representing companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell Oil. In addition to providing funds, CEA has shipped representatives across the country to help electric utilities fight their battles in Florida, Indiana, Maine and Utah.

*Special interests continue to fight the growth of solar power. Groups like Americans for Prosperity and the Edison Electric Institute have run misinformation campaigns against net metering and other solar policies.*

# Utilities Are Attacking Solar Power in the States

- In Florida, **Florida Power and Light**, **Gulf Power Electric**, **Tampa Electric Company** and **Duke Energy**, the largest utility in the U.S., spent millions of dollars funding the front group “Consumers for Smart Solar.” It was the primary backer of a failed 2016 ballot initiative that targeted the incentives to “go solar” in the Sunshine State. In 2017, Florida Power and Light drafted language for a bill to restrict solar growth in Florida.
- In Texas, **El Paso Electric** renewed its efforts to create a separate, more expensive rate class for solar customers. In 2015, the utility spent \$3.1 million on filing and negotiating fees, an amount ultimately charged to ratepayers, on a previous attempt to make the change.
- In Utah, **Rocky Mountain Power** has tried multiple times to eliminate net metering and charge additional fees to its 20,000 customers that generate rooftop power. In 2017, public outcry forced Rocky Mountain Power to settle its rate case, grandfathering all current solar customers into net metering.

## Blocking Special Interest Attacks on Solar Power

The appointment of long-time utility and fossil fuel industry allies to key federal posts in the Trump administration gives special interests a national platform to shape America’s energy policy and slow the growth of solar energy. Strong state policies are more important than ever in protecting solar power from these special interests.

To continue the nation’s progress toward a renewable energy future, states should embrace ambitious goals for solar power and adopt policies that ensure people and businesses who install solar panels are fairly compensated, while rejecting unfair charges for solar customers. They should also expand access through creative financing mechanisms that remove common barriers to investing in clean energy.



## Public Backlash in Nevada Reverses Utility Attack on Rooftop Solar

In 2015, with Nevada emerging as a U.S. solar leader, the state’s largest utility, Nevada Energy, campaigned to eliminate net metering and institute new charges for solar customers. By December of that year, the Nevada Public Utilities Commission had voted to triple solar fees and slash net metering rates. The decision was supported by “Citizens for Solar Energy Fairness,” a political action committee funded by Nevada Energy. The new solar policies crippled the growth of solar energy in the utility’s territory – with the number of new net metering customers declining from an average of 1,000 per month in 2015 to less than 34 in September 2016. The anti-solar policies also led to the exodus of clean tech companies like Tesla’s SolarCity from the state, taking with them local jobs and investments.

Public outcry and the rapid loss of solar jobs led Governor Brian Sandoval and legislators to consider a full repeal. In June 2017, Governor Sandoval signed legislation to restore net metering up to 95% of the retail rate and ban utilities from charging extra fees to solar customers. NV Energy’s number of new net metering customers has started to slowly increase again, with 207 enrollments in June compared to 98 in January of 2017.



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