

Time to Unleash

SOUTH CAROLINA'S SOLAR POWER POTENTIAL

The time has come to unleash home-grown solar power in South Carolina. Georgia, North Carolina and a majority of states are well ahead of the Palmetto State in solar power—yet South Carolina has some of the greatest solar resources in the nation. Solar energy creates good-paying jobs, generates homegrown energy and gives people and businesses more energy freedom and independence.



SC's Neighbors are Surging Ahead with Solar Power

South Carolina's neighbors are adopting smart policies to take advantage of low solar prices. Georgia is the fastest-growing solar market in the nation.¹ By 2017, Georgia Power will have installed 735 MW of solar energy (enough to power more than 120,000 homes)—without putting any upward pressure on rates. Georgia's Public Service Commission has stated that “as the cost of coal continues to rise, solar energy has become very competitive with fossil fuels ... solar energy provides an outstanding opportunity to supplement our state's fossil fuel and nuclear power sources.”²

With over 550 MW of solar energy, North Carolina ranks fourth in the country in installed solar capacity.³ Last year alone, \$787 million was invested in North Carolina to install solar energy by homeowners, businesses and utilities.⁴

Nationally, solar energy has reached a critical tipping point—last year, almost a third of all new U.S. electricity came from solar.⁵ Today, there is enough solar energy in America to power 2.2 million homes.⁶

Solar Means Jobs for SC

SC imports all the coal it uses to run its power plants, sending \$1.1 billion out of state each year—which adds up to a staggering \$245 per person.⁷ More solar power generation means that money stays here in our state, creating good jobs that can't be exported and installing solar right in our communities.

Employment in South Carolina's renewable energy sector increased by 3.6 percent in 2012 versus 2011—more than twice the overall rate of employment growth in the state during the same period, with approximately 17,913 full-time equivalent employees working in the industry in 2012.⁸

Solar employment across the country is growing ten times faster than the national average employment rate. Policies to unleash SC's solar potential will boost jobs while making the state more economically competitive for international businesses like Boeing and BMW that seek renewable energy opportunities.

Solar Power Boosts Independence and Lowers Overall Energy Costs

Today, South Carolina has the highest residential electricity bills in the South, and unfortunately, customers' energy costs are expected to continue to rise due to increasing and volatile fuel prices and the need to control harmful pollution.¹⁰

At the same time other energy prices are rising, the price of solar energy is going down. Since 2011, solar panel prices have decreased by 60 percent.¹¹ On average, solar panels return two to four times their cost in saved electricity bills.¹² And because of our state's high electricity rates, SC ranks 9th in the country—and first in the South—in terms of the return on investment of solar.¹³

The Public Overwhelmingly Supports Solar—and that Support is Tripartisan

A whopping 74 percent of Southerners believe that there should be more emphasis on producing solar energy. Moreover, tripartisan support for solar continues to grow: 74 percent of independents, 68 percent of Republicans and more than 80 percent of Democrats polled support more solar power.¹⁴

Solar Power Can Benefit **All** Customers – Not Just Customers With Solar on their Rooftops

A number of studies have concluded that investments by residents and businesses in solar can save all customers money.¹⁵ The sun shines brightest during the heat of the day, when power is most expensive to buy. This saves fuel costs (sunshine is free) and helps avoid the need for expensive new power plants. That's a triple win, since these savings from solar power work to keep costs low for all customers.



Solar Power Protects Citizens from the Risk of Price Hikes

When utilities build large fossil-fueled or nuclear power plants, customers often bear the risk of huge cost overruns. Solar power protects customers because when solar power is bought from an independent producer, any cost overruns are paid by the solar company, and customers are only billed for the energy that is delivered.

Solar energy systems can also be built large or small. This helps save customers money because the size of systems can track customer demand for more power, allowing new power to be added only when and where it is needed.

Solar power is also a hedge against cost risks that come with overreliance on fossil fuels like coal and gas. When fossil fuel prices go up, customers pay the bill. That's also the case as true health costs of burning coal are internalized and reflected in rates. Solar power has free fuel that doesn't pollute

Solar Power Protects our Health and Natural Resources

Burning fossil fuels to generate electricity causes smog in our towns, high asthma rates in our neighborhoods, and mercury in our waterways.¹⁶ Solar power systems use a pollution-free resource—the sun. By investing in solar power, we decrease our reliance on dirty, risky fossil fuel sources, and we ensure a brighter future for our state—protecting the air we breathe, the water we drink and the health of our communities.

Solar Power Is Constrained In South Carolina by Antiquated Policies

States across the nation are making it easier for low and moderate income families to have access to affordable solar energy. In places where solar financing and third party leasing are available, the upfront costs of buying a solar system are removed, allowing more open access to cost savings.¹⁷ A recent study that analyzed solar installations in three states with solar financing options found that solar installations were overwhelmingly occurring in middle-class neighborhoods.¹⁸

Free market solutions allow low- and middle-income ratepayers to directly benefit from lower and more stable energy bills that come from investing in solar, yet the existing law in South Carolina inhibits these market solutions. Changing the law would unleash solar and make it accessible to thousands of customers in the Palmetto State.



ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.seia.org/research-resources/2013-top-10-solar-states>

² Georgia Public Service Commission, Docket No. 36286, Order Re: Notice of Georgia Solar Utilities, Incorporated's Request to be Authorized as a Solar Utility (Dec. 4, 2012).

³ <http://www.seia.org/state-solar-policy/north-carolina>

⁴ Id.

⁵ <http://gigaom.com/2014/03/05/almost-a-third-of-new-u-s-electricity-came-from-solar-last-year/>

⁶ <http://www.seia.org/research-resources/solar-industry-data>

⁷ http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/clean_energy/Burning-Coal-Burning-Cash_full-report.pdf.

⁸ http://www.scceba.biz/files/dmfile/SCCEBA_2012_Survey_Results_WD11.pdf

⁹ <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20130707/PC1610/130709576>

¹⁰ <http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/steo/report/electricity.cfm> (The U.S. Energy Information Administration expects the U.S. residential price of electricity to increase 1.9% in 2014 and 2.0% in 2015).

¹¹ <http://www.seia.org/research-resources/solar-industry-data>

¹² <http://howsolarworks.1bog.org/solar-myths/>

¹³ <http://costofsolar.com/solar-roi/>

¹⁴ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/161519/americans-emphasis-solar-wind-natural-gas.aspx>

¹⁵ See, e.g., Crossborder Energy, *The Benefits and Costs of Solar Generation for Electric Ratepayers in North Carolina* (Oct. 2013).

¹⁶ Jordan Schneider, Judee Burr, and Elizabeth Ouzts, Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center, *Solar on Superstores: How Commercial Rooftops Can Boost Clean Energy Production in North Carolina*, Feb. 2014. At 15-16.

¹⁷ <http://cleantechnica.com/2013/02/15/report-record-year-for-california-3rd-party-home-solar-leases/> (noting that two-thirds of home solar installations are now occurring in low- and median-income neighborhoods in California, where third-party leasing is permitted under state law)..

¹⁸ See also <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/report/2013/10/21/76013/solar-power-to-the-people-the-rise-of-rooftop-solar-among-the-middle-class/> (middle class household defined as those with median incomes ranging from \$40,000 to \$90,000).



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