

know that the public is on our side and that solar is by far America's most popular energy source. Second, we know that we will eventually win and that since its fuel is free and nonpolluting, solar certainly will become America's preferred energy source. It's just a question of when and how that will happen.

The longer the United States waits to get serious about solar, the harder it will be to catch up to other countries and to fight climate change. And if monopoly utilities succeed in locking out most rooftop solar in the future—making the rules favor large solar arrays run by utilities themselves—then our electrical grid will remain vulnerable and inefficient.

That's why rooftop solar advocates need to risk the big battles, just as Washington did when he crossed the Delaware. We should not settle for small gains like keeping net metering in our state. Instead, solar patriots should insist on citizens enjoying full rights to use, share, and sell solar power at fair market value. And we should insist on a national energy marketplace that makes fossil fuels pay their full costs. Only then will solar be as affordable as a clean energy source with no fuel cost and little pollution should be.

Ten

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT GROUP FOR YOU

*The good men may do separately is small
compared with what they may do collectively.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Joining a group, even if it's only remotely via the Internet, is the best way to push for government rules and laws that will help solar power. You'll find two types of groups that support solar policy changes:

- Solar-only groups
- Groups that include solar as one of several issues

Depending on your interests and where you live, one or both types of groups may interest you.

Solar-Only Groups

In the United States, the main groups focused exclusively on solar power tend to be associations of industry professionals such as the Solar Energy Industries Association. Its members are people who work at solar companies. These include firms that manufacture solar panels, inverters, racks, and other equipment for solar power along with businesses that install solar energy systems for homes, businesses, and electric utilities. As SEIA's website puts it, they "represent the entire solar industry; from the small-business owners to the multi-national companies, from the installers on the roof to the engineers in the lab."

Out of self-interest, these companies support a fair marketplace for solar so that they can grow their businesses. Fortunately, that's also what America needs right now to gain clean energy independence.

SEIA does offer some resources about big issues of public policy on solar power. You can see SEIA's top priorities for good solar policy in Appendix C of this book. But since SEIA's information is aimed at solar industry professionals, the average solar homeowner may find it to be a bit dry or technical. Also, critics have accused SEIA of favoring big solar plants owned by utilities over small solar arrays installed on rooftops of homes and small businesses, so some of their information may be less interesting to citizens who support more rooftop solar.

Other groups advocating for solar power may offer more accessible information about solar public policy. On a national level, Vote Solar has been advocating for better solar policy since 2002. As their website puts it, "Vote Solar has worked to remove regulatory barriers and implement key policies needed to bring solar to scale." The group focuses on supporting or opposing legislation in different states, from California to Colorado to Massachusetts, depending on whether the proposed policy will either help or hurt solar power.

For example, in 2017 they ran a campaign to allow community solar (shared solar) in Connecticut:

Join Our Fight for Connecticut's Clean Energy Economy. Right now, Connecticut lawmakers can unlock solar access for all Connecticut families and businesses statewide. A community "shared solar" program will expand access to clean energy choices, lower utility bills, and promote a healthier environment in our communities.

Another national group advocating for good solar policy is Solar United Neighbors, a group mentioned several times in this book and whose clear and powerful Solar Bill of Rights you'll find in Appendix B. Finally, depending on where you live, there may also be a group focused on solar rights for your state or region. For example, where I live

in Virginia, solar companies and environmental groups have united with concerned citizens to form the Virginia Distributed Solar Alliance.

Multi-Issue Groups that Include Solar

You may be more attracted to one of the multi-issue groups that also handles solar power.

What's the best way to find a group that's right for you?

First, pick a group that matches your other interests. For example, if you're a person of faith, you might be interested in joining other believers working on behalf of solar power. Examples include Interfaith Power and Light, which welcomes people of all faiths, or groups specific to a particular faith such as the Christian Coalition (rooftop solar is now one of their top issues), the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, or the Buddhist Environmental Initiative.

Or, if your focus is the environment, then you have your choice of several well established national groups, from the Sierra Club to the Natural Resources Defense Council to Greenpeace to 350.org founded by author Bill McKibben to the Climate Reality Project founded by Al Gore. You can also look for local groups focused on the environment or even on climate change, such as the Chesapeake Climate

Action Network covering the mid-Atlantic states. Some groups also combine renewable energy with social issues. For example, Green for All, founded by civil rights leader and former advisor to the Obama White House, Van Jones, works both to spread clean energy and to lift people out of poverty.

People who support free-market principles may like such newer groups as ConservAmerica, Conservatives for Clean Energy, or RepublicEn, the latter founded by former South Carolina Congressman Bob Inglis who we first learned about in Chapter 2. In your local area, there may be a group of conservatives advocating for renewable energy such as the Green Tea Party in Georgia, or the Palmetto Conservative Solar Coalition in South Carolina.

Find the group's website and check out their approach and their accomplishments. Then if the group seems like a good fit for you, make contact. If they have a local chapter in your area, go to their next meeting. If not, then try to talk to a representative of the group by phone or at least by email. Maybe if you get involved enough, you'll end up starting a local chapter!

Not to leave out progressives, but you'll find plenty of likeminded people who also support climate action and rooftop solar in the environmental groups listed earlier, at your local Democratic Party Committee, or in smaller groups that bundle clean energy and environmental

protection with such issues as gender and racial equality, labor rights, and building peace.

Groups make it easy for you to connect with them. They'll give you a warm and friendly welcome if you come to one of their meetings. Group organizers are always grateful to connect with potential new members. As a solar homeowner, you'll be especially interesting to any group that's pushing for better solar policy. Most groups don't charge any membership dues. And for those that do, you usually don't need to become a paying member to attend a meeting or two and get started with their outreach efforts in support of solar.

You should also consider the solutions that the group proposes. Is it net metering and other incentives for solar homeowners? Is it different environmental regulations and limits on pollution from fossil fuels? Or tax reform that helps make clean energy more affordable?

One solution popular now with groups that support renewable energy across the political spectrum mentioned earlier is carbon fee-and-dividend. This idea would let the free market decide between fossil fuels and clean energy based on price. Groups including the conservative-leaning Climate Leadership Council and the bi-partisan Citizens' Climate Lobby support this idea as the most powerful way to encourage clean energy. Since this solution has so much promise to help solar, let's look into it a bit in the next chapter.



FROM THE REVOLUTION: FRENCH ALLIES

The American Revolution was a lopsided contest from the start. On one side, representing American patriots, the Continental Army—amateur soldiers straight off the farm, hastily organized into an army so poorly funded that soldiers and suppliers alike were paid in IOUs. On the other side, fighting for King George III, the British Army—professional soldiers of the world's most extensive empire, well-fed, well-armed, well-trained, and backed up by the ships of the British Navy, the world's largest fleet of warships. The Americans may have had the home-field advantage, along with grit and determination. But without the help of powerful allies from abroad, the Americans never could have beat Britain.

France, Spain, and Holland aided the Americans less for sympathy with the ideals of freedom and equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence than to tweak those nations' common enemy, Great Britain. Yet, it was the Americans who got the most benefit.

France in particular helped tip the balance in favor of the Americans. Even before French King Louis XVI declared war on Britain, idealistic and ambitious French officers, including the Marquis de Lafayette, volunteered to help lead American troops, and the French government

secretly provided Washington's army with weapons and ammunition. When the French openly entered the war in 1778, their powerful military helped the Americans on both sea and land. The combined American and French forces won their greatest victory at the Battle of Yorktown, which brought the war to a victorious conclusion. We'll discuss Yorktown in the next chapter.

Today's solar homeowners have already teamed up with several key allies in the fight for solar rights against monopoly utilities. Allies have included solar industry trade groups such as the Solar Energy Industries Association and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club. But solar allies are up against a formidable and established opponent. Like the army of King George III, the forces of monopoly utilities are well-funded and well-armed, in their case, with lobbyists and public relations departments. To stand up to the imperial might of utilities, solar patriots need all the help they can get.

In the future, if they can be convinced that rooftop solar is needed along with utility solar, then unlikely allies including some of America's biggest corporations such as Amazon and Microsoft may prove decisive in helping solar homeowners win. It all begins with reaching out to those who may not yet have joined the fight for rooftop solar rights but who clearly have a stake in helping America switch to a clean-energy economy.

Eleven

THE NEW KILLER APP TO SPREAD SOLAR

*We have it in our power to begin
the world over again.*

—THOMAS PAINE

In the technology world, a killer app is a software program or service that creates its own market. For example, Uber created a new market of people who wanted a ride to work but didn't want to spend the money on a taxi. Likewise, Airbnb created a market for tourists who wanted to stay in private homes.

What would a killer app to spread solar look like? To start with, it might not be a software program or online service. Instead, a killer app for solar might be a new idea in public policy.