

Twelve

TO ARMS!

THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

—THOMAS PAINE

I hope now that you're ready to join the ranks of solar homeowners who are fighting for solar rights. You have good reason to fight, since the cause is your own. If you've already invested in solar panels at home, then you'll want to protect your investment. You'll want to be able to continue to sell extra power back to the grid at a fair

rate—without having to pay a high monthly fee or special power rates that discriminate against solar homeowners.

The cause of solar in America is also your own if you care about the future of our country. Getting solar panels was already an important step for you to leave a legacy to future generations. They will praise you for contributing to America's clean energy independence. And today, your leadership can inspire other people to follow your example. As we've seen, the example of a homeowner who's already gone solar is perhaps the most powerful message to encourage neighbors, family, and friends to go solar themselves.

It can be easy to do your part to spread solar among the people you know. Once people find out that you have solar panels at home, many of them will want to know about it. They'll ask you about how much it cost, is it worth it, what incentives are available, what the installation process was like, how you found a solar installer, and other questions about your home solar array. By just answering questions like these as they come up naturally in conversation, you will help to create awareness and interest in solar power.

You can go further by referring your neighbors, family, and friends to your solar installation company. You can do this informally, by just giving your recommendation. Or, if your installer offers a customer referral program, you can become a member. In that way, you might be able to earn referral bonuses when people you know sign up

to go solar at their homes. And you might also be able to get help from your solar company in approaching people about going solar. This help can range from the solar company providing you with a fact sheet you can give out to offering you help holding an event at your home or church with refreshments and a speaker.

And if you're ready to do even more to spread solar, you can step up to the role of citizen-lobbyist. You can certainly start contacting public officials to express your support for solar power on your own. But joining a local or national group dedicated to solar or clean energy will make it easier and help your outreach be more effective.

A group can help you find out about proposed actions by local, state, and federal government that might affect solar power in your area. A group can also coach you on making effective contacts with public officials, from members of city council to members of Congress. A group can offer you advice for writing persuasive letters to your local paper. Finally, a group can connect you with new friends who can offer you moral support and encouragement in your outreach as a citizen standing up for solar rights.

If you are serious about lobbying for government regulations and new laws that make it easier for more homeowners to go solar, then I strongly suggest that you join a group. Fortunately, these days you'll find a wide range of groups that support solar appealing to a variety of

interests, ranging from the far-left to the far-right on the political spectrum. And of course, everything in between. You're certain to find a group that's for you. Just check out the list of groups in Appendix D of this book.

To be an effective advocate for solar power, you'll need information. Groups and other resources listed in Appendix D can help you find the facts and background you need to become an expert on solar policy. And the list of solar myths busted in Appendix A will help you answer some of the most common challenges you'll hear about whether solar power is viable to power America's economy today.

Information will empower you and give you confidence to speak up for solar as an energy source that's ready to go at this very minute. But just as important as being armed with information is being fired by inspiration.

Spreading solar around America will take decades to complete. It's probably inevitable that our country will run primarily on solar power in the future. But when that happens is up to us. And timing is important. The longer America waits to go solar, the longer we will be stuck in a dirty energy economy that endangers our future. And the longer America waits to take leadership on solar, the more that other nations such as China will gain an advantage over us in creating jobs and installing a new energy system for the 21st century.

Going solar sooner could be what's needed to help America maintain its leadership in the global economy.

It will take advocates like you to help solar come sooner rather than later. And the fight for solar rights will not be an easy war to win. There will be many battles with electric utilities just like those fought in Nevada in 2016 and 2017 over net metering and fixed charges. Other states will become battlefields for overreaching utilities who want to crush solar homeowners just to preserve their monopoly power over energy and keep their profits high for a few more years.

In the short term, solar homeowners must fight to preserve their current solar rights to net metering and to avoid discrimination by electric utilities that want to charge monthly fees or apply special rates only to solar homeowners. These fights will happen primarily at the state level, from California to New York, from Florida to Oregon, from Alaska to Hawaii.

But for the longer term, solar homeowners should start to work on the federal level to pass a national policy that will help solar become America's main energy source. So far, the most promising idea to do that is a carbon fee that would make fossil fuels more expensive and make solar and other clean energy sources cheaper. By helping the free market to set prices more accurately for different types of energy, more Americans will choose solar based entirely on price.

By combining the carbon-fee idea with a dividend that would refund 100 percent of the proceeds to American

families equally, this idea will be fair to low-income homeowners and the idea will also be viable politically. Since the refund would make a carbon fee different than a tax, Congress is more likely to pass a carbon fee that's coupled with a dividend. This is the idea that both Republicans including former Secretaries of State George Shultz and James A. Baker III and Democrats such as Al Gore support.

Victory in Sight

To win battles to protect solar rights in the short term and to gain a fair market for rooftop solar power in the long term, the solar industry needs an army of solar homeowners who will stand up for solar rights. Just as King George III brought the world's most powerful military machine to bear upon the American patriots after they declared their independence from imperial rule in 1776, so today's electric utilities come to battles with solar homeowners heavily armed with lobbyists and with an army of mercenaries (like the fake citizens group Consumers for Smart Solar that pushed the anti-solar Amendment 1 in 2016) ready to fight to preserve their rule.

Beating these energy tyrants with the people power of energy patriots will take patience and perseverance. It will also take the vigilance and nimbleness showed by Paul

Revere in his midnight ride to warn the towns of Lexington and Concord that the British were coming.

So, just as Thomas Paine said that fighting for American freedom from King George III was not for *summer soldiers and sunshine patriots*, so the fight for solar rights will not be easy or quick. But like the ordinary citizens who fought as soldiers in the American Revolution, those citizens who fight the solar revolution today will deserve the thanks of all Americans today and for generations to come.

After Victory, Making Peace with Utilities

To be fair, not all electric utilities are energy tyrants. Some utilities, especially in California and New York, have been working with the solar industry to integrate more solar into the grid for years. And these responsible utilities have also been trying to fairly reward solar homeowners for the extra clean solar power that they sell back to the grid to share with their neighbors.

Whether utilities work positively with solar homeowners today or utilities continue to try to exercise monopoly control over the electricity in their territory, nobody will benefit by crushing utilities. With a century of experience keeping the lights on, utilities have an important place in America's clean energy future.

The question is: how to best use utilities' expertise and vast resources to put the interests of the American people ahead of the private interests of utility shareholders and CEOs?

As long as utilities own the wires that connect your house with extra solar power to sell to other homes that need solar power, utilities will have a financial incentive to find ways to block access of solar homeowners to the grid so they can sell more power from the big power plants that they operate themselves.

Consider an example that may be familiar to the ordinary person: watching TV shows on the Internet.

Verizon or Comcast may provide your Internet service. But they don't also produce the streaming shows you watch online such as *Game of Thrones* or *Stranger Things*. And that's a very good thing. Because if Internet service providers not only sold you Internet service but also produced their own TV shows, then those ISPs would have a business interest in blocking other TV shows from their Internet service. If ISPs made their own content and distributed it over their own wires, that would mean you could have plenty of "World Headlines from Verizon" or "Comcast Comedy Hour," but less of CNN or Comedy Central.

It's the same with electric utilities and the electrical grid. If utilities control not just the wires, but also offer their own power, then they have a business interest in blocking other power providers, including solar homeowners,

from selling power on the utilities' own grid. That's called a conflict of interest.

To eliminate the utilities' conflict of interest and provide fair access to the grid to rooftop solar owners, it will be necessary to "decouple" or separate the two functions of a) producing power and b) running the electrical grid.

Running the grid together with power plans was necessary in the old days, when utilities were the only ones able to produce electric power. But it's not necessary today for the same company to both run the grid and produce power when homeowners and other small producers can also make their own electricity.

"Structure the rules for the market and rules for the utility system based on today, not on 100 years ago," John Farrell, who serves as Director of Energy Democracy at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance told me.

Updating our electricity system's rules would involve decoupling power production from controlling the grid.

The most common idea for decoupling is to let utilities continue to run the grid, while making them spin off their power plants to other companies. If you'd like to know more about this idea, check out the Alliance to Save Energy, which explains how this type of decoupling can help encourage more solar but can also get utilities on board to help their customers use less energy overall through conservation and efficiency.

A more radical version of decoupling involves the opposite: let utilities continue to run big power plants, but take away their power over the electrical grid. John Farrell at ILSR favors this approach.

To give solar homeowners a fair way to sell power to other people who want to use solar but don't have their own, Farrell thinks that we should put the grid in the hands of a non-profit organization that doesn't also produce electricity.

That grid operator would then solicit competitive bids to provide electricity from all sources fairly. This would finally create a level playing field for solar homeowners with utilities. It would also encourage utilities to update old grid technology to better accommodate rooftop solar producers and help all Americans to use electricity more efficiently.

"The grid has been built like a 40-lane freeway so that you'd never have congestion," Farrell explained. "That was the only way we knew to do it in the past. What we've never thought about is how can we ask the people who are driving to use less power or generate their own lane by bringing their own electricity."

Such an open grid could be just what's needed to give solar homeowners fair access to America's electricity infrastructure. Creating an independent grid could be the peace treaty that's needed for utilities and solar homeowners to finally get along. A firm and fair understanding

between solar homeowners and utilities could lead to decades of growth for solar in this century and a more stable electrical grid for everybody's benefit.

It's not about getting rid of electric utilities. It's just about establishing the correct relationship between utilities on the one hand and people who produce distributed solar power on the other. That relationship should not be one of subservience, where monopoly utilities have all the power and will use it to discriminate against rooftop solar owners. Instead, the relationship between utilities and the homeowner and small businesses who make clean energy from rooftop solar needs to be one of equality. Only then can the American people live in peace with electric utilities.



FROM THE REVOLUTION: TREATY OF PARIS

On September 3, 1783, two years after the Battle of Yorktown, an American delegation of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay met in Paris to sign a peace treaty with David Hartley, an envoy of King George III. The Treaty of Paris formally ended the Revolutionary War. But the accord's significance went beyond Britain recognizing the independence of the United States.

“The Treaty of Paris was a part of the future rather than the past,” argues historian Michael Lee Lanning. That’s because the Battle of Yorktown had ended the war on the ground. Effectively, the American and French victory at Yorktown had already granted independence to the thirteen former British colonies from New Hampshire in the north to Georgia in the south. The treaty just put that reality on paper.

The real importance of the Treaty of Paris was that it wound up giving the Americans much more land than they had before. The negotiations doubled the size of the new nation, granting the U.S. generous territory well beyond the original Atlantic seaboard states, encompassing new lands extending to the Great Lakes in the north, the Mississippi River in the west, and the Gulf Coast in the south.

The lesson for today’s solar patriots is that we should aim high. We should not settle for little victories in our

own states such as preserving incentives like net metering or fighting off discriminatory fees like monthly fixed charges on electric bills. Instead, we should keep fighting—and negotiating—until the playing field for rooftop solar is totally level with other energy sources. Only then can solar take its rightful place as America’s #1 energy source, with much of that solar capacity located on home rooftops.

For that, solar homeowners will need to work with utility companies. The Treaty of Paris can provide a good lesson for how enemies can become friends, once a proper relationship is established between the two.

Ever since the American victory forced Britain to recognize the United States as an independent nation in 1783, the two nations have enjoyed a connection so close that diplomats refer to it as the “Special Relationship.” And after the War of 1812, the United States never fought another war against Great Britain. Instead, the two nations became the strongest of allies, fighting side by side in both World Wars and enjoying strong trade, cultural exchange, and tourism.

In the same way, once solar homeowners and their allies force utilities to abandon their monopoly on producing power and agree to respect the rights of solar homeowners to freely access America’s electrical grid, then solar patriots and electric utilities can become good friends. Both parties can work together to make sure that America enjoys clean, reliable electricity for decades to come.