

Solar Net Metering Under Attack

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

As the United States and the world moves away from fossil fuels toward more sustainable sources of energy it is important to be vigilante. These cleaner solutions to our energy needs will eventually replace entrenched industries which have been money making machines for some individuals and companies.

Net metering is a billing mechanism in which surplus power is transferred onto the grid, allowing customers to offset the cost of power drawn from the utility. It compensates residential and commercial customers for energy that they generate, the surplus of which is pushed back to the grid. According to Solarpowerworldonline.com, as of March 27, 2020, there are only 3 states, Alabama, South Dakota, and Tennessee, that offer no form of net metering or compensation for contributing solar energy to the grid.

In our Estes Park home, we enjoy 10-kilowatts (kW) of solar, and the \$23 meter reading fee is all we see on our electric bill. This is known as net-zero. The ROI for this solar array is approximately 12 to 15 years. We donated work on the design of the solar array for the Estes Park United Methodist Church. Its energy use is net-zero due to the investment. Colorado is a leader in solar energy development.

The State of Colorado Energy Office has a wide range of information about our state's solar resources. We are home to more than 454 solar companies, employing about 6,000 people statewide. Colorado is in the forefront of providing Low-Income Community Solar. The Low-Income Community Solar Demonstration Project Insights (2018) and case studies for eight statewide demonstration projects can be found on the Colorado Energy Office website. The Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association (PVREA) Demonstration Project developed a 1.95-megawatt (MW) solar array, and serves low-income, non-profits and interested PVREA members. The low-income allocation is 700-kW. By partnering in such projects Colorado has committed to making the benefits of solar power available to all its citizens.

A recent petition by a so-called non-profit group New England Ratepayers Association (NERA) is asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to place net metering under federal control. The Center for Biological Diversity has filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request seeking records to determine if "the FERC is collaborating with anti-solar utility or industry groups to undermine the move to clean energy." A separate petition by advocacy group Public Citizen and New Hampshire legislators is requesting NERA be required to reveal its members. On June 15, 2020, Public Citizen submitted a Motion to Dismiss the April 14, 2020 NERA filing. This motion points out that the NERA petition seeks to end more than 40 states' administration of net metering. Public Citizen submits documents which "suggest that far from being a typical "ratepayer advocate" organization, NERA is actually structured as a trade association with only 15 members paying annual dues of up to \$20,000 representing 92% of the organization's revenue. NERA is falsely characterizing itself to distort the official record and conceal the motives of those financing this very expensive effort." The footnote points out that NERA paid \$30,060 to file the petition.

The timing of the NERA petition filing is suspect, done during the COVID-19 pandemic and under an administration that takes pride in climate change denial.

Why should we care? This group is representing itself as an advocate for low-income households, without producing any evidence of this advocacy. It appears the group is intent on causing harm to the rooftop solar market. If granted their request will "single-handedly disrupt a major component of U.S.

electricity policy” and “states will be stripped of their rightful authorities”. A PV-Magazine-USA.com quote from The Center for Biological Diversity states the NERA petition is founded upon “Thoroughly debunked industry talking points that solar customers are unfairly subsidized, ignoring both the enormous subsidies given to the fossil fuel industry and distributed clean energy’s power to curb pollution, improve the grid and otherwise advance the vital clean energy transition.”

Tell your legislators net-metering is a good thing for Coloradans, and the environment. Ask them to oppose this sneaky attempt by a small group of self-serving fossil fuel industry dinosaurs to take away our state’s energy independence.

Beck, Thomas W. “Solar Net Metering Under Attack”, *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, July 17, 2020