Electric utilities and fossil fuel front groups are working to slow the growth of solar energy through misinformation campaigns, anti-solar ballot initiatives, and new charges for rooftop solar owners.

Solar Energy Is Booming
Emission-free and increasingly affordable, solar power is booming. The amount of solar energy installed in the U.S. quadrupled from 2012 to 2016, and today the U.S. produces enough solar electricity to power one in 20 American homes. In 2015, solar generation averted approximately 27 million metric tons of carbon dioxide pollution, equivalent to taking nearly 6 million passenger vehicles off the road.

Fossil Fuel and Utility Groups Are Working to Slow the Rise of Solar Energy
Solar power is incredibly popular among Americans, but not everyone is happy about the solar boom. Electric utilities, fossil fuel interests and powerful industry front groups have been waging a behind-the-scenes campaign to attack the key public policies that put solar energy on the map in the United States:

- 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 Koch brothers fund opaque non-profits that promote anti-solar campaigns, including a recent campaign to pass an anti-solar ballot initiative in Florida.
- The Consumer Energy Alliance conveys to the public that it is a pro-solar consumer group, but actually attacks key solar policies while representing fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron.

Special interests are working to slow the solar boom. Groups like Americans for Prosperity and the Heartland Institute have run misinformation campaigns against net metering and other solar policies.
Electric Utilities Are Battling Solar Energy in the States

Across the country, electric utilities are leading the fight to stop solar power in state legislative offices and regulatory agencies. For example:

• **NV Energy**, a subsidiary of Warren Buffet’s Berkshire Hathaway Energy, successfully campaigned in Nevada for a utility commission ruling that has effectively halted the growth of rooftop solar in its service area.

• **Commonwealth Edison**, Illinois’ largest utility, introduced legislation with the potential to reduce the economic viability of rooftop solar for all of the state’s residents.

• Four major Arizona utilities – the Salt River Project (SRP), Arizona Public Service, and sister companies Tucson Electric Power and Unisource – have worked to impose new charges on their solar customers, including a charge instituted by SRP that dramatically slowed solar energy adoption.

• In California, the publicly-owned utility Imperial Irrigation District abruptly ended its net metering program, stunting future solar energy growth and temporarily stranding many of its customers that were in the midst of rooftop solar installations.

Stopping the Utility Attacks on Solar Power

To keep the solar boom alive, states should embrace ambitious goals for solar energy and adopt policies that ensure people and businesses who install solar power are fairly compensated, while rejecting unfair charges for solar customers. They should also expand access to solar energy, including through virtual net metering and by allowing companies other than utilities to sell or lease solar panels to residents and businesses.

Voters Defeat Florida Utilities’ Deceptive Anti-Solar Ballot Initiative

In 2016, Florida’s largest utilities came together in support of the anti-solar Amendment 1 ballot initiative, in an attempt to add language to the state constitution that would allow the creation of barriers to rooftop solar. Amendment 1 was placed on the ballot by Consumers for Smart Solar, a group that received $21 million of its $26 million in campaign funds from four of Florida’s largest utilities: Duke Energy, Florida Power and Light Company, Tampa Electric Company and Gulf Power Company.

Consumers for Smart Solar purported to be a pro-solar consumer group, with a website claiming the amendment “promotes solar in the Sunshine State, protects Florida’s consumers from scams and rip-offs and guarantees the right to place solar panels on your home.” Yet Florida Supreme Court Justice Barbara Pariente, who voted against allowing the bill on the ballot, said of Amendment 1: “Masquerading as a pro-solar energy initiative, this proposed constitutional amendment, supported by some of Florida’s major investor-owned electric utility companies, actually seeks to constitutionalize the status quo.” Less than a month before the election, the policy director of a think tank supported by Gulf Power Company was caught on audio recording admitting the deceptive strategy behind Amendment 1.

Despite utility efforts, in November 2016 Amendment 1 was rejected by Florida voters, falling nine percentage points short of the 60 percent approval required for adoption into the state constitution.

*Blocking the Sun* is a report written by Frontier Group and Environment America Research and Policy Center.

For more information and the full report, please visit [www.EnvironmentAmericaCenter.org](http://www.EnvironmentAmericaCenter.org)