

colonists agreed to pay the new taxes imposed from the outside, they would be admitting that British authorities had a right to take the colonists' money without their consent, since Americans had no representatives in Parliament. Also, since Britons back home didn't have to pay these taxes, the Americans, who considered themselves equal to people living in Britain, thought that these taxes discriminated against the colonies. So, to demand fairness and to protect their autonomy, the colonists protested the taxes.

Today, solar homeowners are not facing additional taxes *per se*. But solar homeowners are facing additional fees from utilities approved by state governments, as in the case of Nevada. Yet, the parallel between these government-approved utility fees on solar today and the taxes imposed by the British government on the American colonists before the Revolution is clear.

Monopoly utilities are a kind of private company that has power similar to that of a government. When such a utility levies an extra fee on solar homeowners without the consent of either the homeowners or local citizens, then that utility is acting like an autocratic power. To protect their rights, solar homeowners have begun to stand up to utilities and to the government regulators and elected officials who help those utilities to deprive solar homeowners of their private property without giving them adequate representation in the decision-making process.

Two

THE SECRET PLAN TO QUELL THE ROOFTOP REBELLION

*Justly those we tyrants call who
the body would enthrall.
Tyrants of more cruel kind—those
who would enslave the mind.*

—“CUPID, GOD OF SOFT PERSUASION”
(18TH CENTURY SONG)

It turns out that the attack on rooftop solar in Nevada wasn't an isolated skirmish. It was actually part of a secret plan by the utility industry to kill, or at least slow down, rooftop solar around America. And in the sunny state of Florida, this plan almost worked to fool citizens

who overwhelmingly supported solar power into voting against their own right to go solar at home.

This plan, concocted by a cartel of monopoly utility companies trying to protect themselves from competition by rooftop solar, was revealed to the public by watchdog groups who obtained documents presented at utility industry meetings. The watchdogs then shared the utilities' private plan with the news media. This plan involved nothing less than trying to alter the English language itself.

The strategy was to change the meaning of common terms having to do with energy and inventing new ones to make utilities look like trusted advisors with the public's best interest at heart. At the same time, the language change would try to make rooftop solar companies and customers appear greedy, self-centered, and shady.

The goal? To turn the public against rooftop solar. That would put rooftop solar installers on the defensive and place utilities back in the driver's seat. If successful, this plan could put many rooftop solar installers out of business and slow down the spread of rooftop solar across America.

Orwellian Newspeak

To understand the strategy behind the utilities' plan to deceive the public about rooftop solar, let's take a quick detour into the world of literature. Perhaps you'll

remember that in George Orwell's dystopian novel of a totalitarian future, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the government of fictional Oceania took control of the language that ordinary people spoke in order to control the way people think.² That kind of brainwashing made it easier for the repressive government of Big Brother to control how people behaved.

Really, by getting inside people's minds, Big Brother got people to become their own oppressors.

So, in the name of simplifying things—for example, replacing the word “better” with the phrase “plusgood” or putting words together like “Newspeak” (new + speak)—Big Brother's regime changed the meaning of words to suit its needs. For example:

- “Free thinking” became “crimethink,” meaning that thinking for yourself was now illegal.
- Likewise, “brainwashed” became “goodthink,” meaning that if you accepted the government's point of view on all things without question, you were a good citizen.

Big Brother's rule also relied on double-think, which is basically the ability to believe lies, even if they're obvious, as long as they come from Big Brother. Examples are the three slogans of Big Brother's political party, *War is Peace*, *Freedom is Slavery*, and *Ignorance is Strength*.

As a way to help kill rooftop solar, for the last few years, the trade association for monopoly utilities, the

Edison Electric Institute, has been pushing a version of Orwell’s Newspeak applied to the energy industry.

The EEI represents investor-owned utilities around the U.S., including companies in the Southeast such as Dominion, Duke, Appalachian Power, the Southern Company, and Florida Public Utilities. That’s important because activists have identified the region as the sunniest part of the country with the least amount of solar but with the biggest potential for more solar because of good sunshine.

And why do sunny southeastern states like Georgia or Florida have so little solar compared to more northerly states like New York or Massachusetts? You can’t blame it on the sun. The real problem is state rules and regulations that discriminate against rooftop solar. Even as citizens demanded more solar power, states enacted anti-solar public policy and kept it in force largely due to the influence of local utilities in each state. And those utilities got valuable help trying to kill rooftop solar from the Edison Electric Institute.

In 2014, at a private meeting of utilities in Las Vegas, the EEI rolled out its plan to change the way that the English language talks about energy. Called the Lexicon Project, the plan began in secret, though it was later leaked to the Huffington Post and other news media in 2016.³

In the Lexicon Project, just like Big Brother in Orwell’s novel, utilities say they want to simplify communication. “We’re trying to communicate more simply, in a more under-

standable language, but in a way that also reflects this fundamental change in how we want the industry to be viewed going forward,” explained Dale Heydlauff, vice president for corporate communications at American Electric Power Co.

That sounds harmless enough. But this effort has dark implications for rooftop solar. Just check out a few of the words about solar that utilities want to replace, according to a report by their consultant Maslansky + Partners, published in full on the website UtilitySecrets.org and summarized by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, an advocacy group that supports rooftop solar and other local renewable energy⁴:

Current Usage	Utility Newspeak
Utility-scale solar	Universal solar
Rooftop solar	Private solar
Solar installation	Solar power plant
Distributed generation	Private generation (where appropriate)
Net metering	Private solar credits
Wholesale rate	Competitive rate
Baseload generation	24/7 power sources

My favorite here is changing “rooftop solar” into “private solar.” Just think about it. That makes it sound selfish to

put solar panels on your roof instead of just buying more expensive “green power” from your local utility’s large solar plant that may not even offer power for your particular home or business.

Take another example of dangerous utility propaganda. If policymakers start thinking of net metering as “private solar credits,” then homeowners getting paid for the clean energy that PV panels on their roof produce starts to sound like just another government handout to special interests.

Also, the Lexicon Project advises utilities to use the word “smart” more often, as it polled well with the public in their research. More on that below.

Having compiled its biased word list, the utility lobby is not just sitting back and waiting for people to discover it. No, they’re actively encouraging everybody they can to start adopting their new language, as energy and environment publication E&E News explains⁵:

Berkshire Hathaway Energy Co. [the parent of Nevada’s utility NV Energy, mentioned in the last chapter] already is incorporating the lexicon into its communications, said Julie White, vice president for corporate communications at the holding company. The transition to a new way of talking about its business has been “fairly smooth,” she

said, underscoring the importance of explaining the research behind the language to executives.

After adopting its list of Orwellian terms to make rooftop solar look bad, the Edison Electric Institute started a program to train the employees of its member companies to use this new language, using webinars and other Internet-based tools.

Then, EEI began reaching out to the trade associations for electric cooperatives and municipal utilities, sharing the research in the hopes that their anti-rooftop solar language would be adopted industrywide. If utilities can get people outside of their own employees to start using their energy Newspeak, imagine how easy it will be for the utility lobby to push back solar-friendly policies like net metering in any state.

And that’s exactly what they tried to do in Florida in 2016.

In Florida, where “Smart” Meant “Dumb”

A cartel of monopoly utilities including Florida Power & Light, Duke Energy Florida, Gulf Power, and Tampa Electric pushed the deceptively named “Smart Solar” initiative on the November 2016 Florida statewide ballot.

Using completely Orwellian language, the group claimed the initiative would promote “solar choice” by adding an amendment to the state’s constitution claiming to give Floridians the “right” to get solar—while also opening the door for more regulation of the industry.

This language was deceptive for several reasons.

According to Florida Supreme Court Justice Barbara Pariente, Sunshine State residents already had the right to get solar. But if the amendment passed, utility companies could have used it to block competition from solar installers by claiming they are insufficiently regulated or that rooftop solar somehow imposes a subsidy on non-solar utility customers.

Pariente was one of many experts in law and public policy who warned Florida citizens about this solar wolf-in-sheep’s clothing:

Let the pro-solar energy consumers beware. 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. The ballot title is affirmatively misleading by its focus on “Solar Energy Choice,” when no real choice exists for those who favor expansion of solar energy.

When you use the word “choice” to mean “less choice,” the implications of Orwellian language for public policy are clear.

Freedom = Slavery, anyone?

Leading up to the election, utilities spent \$26 million on ads and even set up a fake citizen’s group, Consumers for Smart Solar, to push for the initiative.

For intrigue, the story of the secret utility plan behind this deceptive ballot measure matches any of the spy stories from the American Revolution found in the 2006 book *Washington’s Spies: The Story of America’s First Spy Ring* by Alexander Rose, later made into a gripping TV series by AMC.

During the American Revolution, spies reporting directly to George Washington uncovered British battle plans and covert operations alike, helping the Americans to outmaneuver a much stronger foe. In the same way, just before the election of 2016, a couple of watchdog groups in Florida allied with solar advocates to expose plans by the state’s largest electric utilities to deceive Florida voters into voting to restrict the spread of rooftop solar.

For months leading up to the election, the pro-solar forces had claimed that the utilities’ ballot initiative, Amendment 1, was deceptive. And in October, two watchdog groups seemed to confirm that the initiative was a deliberate utility plot to deceive voters when they made an audio recording available to the *Miami Herald*.⁶

The audio recorded an industry consultant called Sal Nuzzo explaining to a private meeting of utility industry executives that Amendment 1 was “an incredibly savvy maneuver” that “would completely negate anything they (pro-solar interests) would try to do either legislatively or constitutionally down the road.”

In other words, if Amendment 1 passed, it would be difficult for pro-solar rules and regulations to be put in place in Florida in the future.

Nuzzo reminded his audience that ordinary citizens strongly support solar power: “As you guys look at policy in your state, or constitutional ballot initiatives in your state, remember this: Solar polls very well,” he said.

The consultant then went on to flatter the Florida utility executives at the meeting for being so clever with the wording of Amendment 1 as to wrap an anti-solar wolf in pro-solar sheep’s clothing:

“To the degree that we can use a little bit of political *jiu-jitsu* and take what they’re kind of pinning on us and use it to our benefit either in policy, in legislation, or in constitutional referendums—if that’s the direction you want to take—use the language of promoting solar, and kind of, kind of put in these protections for consumers that choose not to install rooftop.”

Of course, by “protections for consumers that choose not to install rooftop,” Nuzzo was really talking about protections for utilities against their customers defecting from their local utility by getting solar at home. While utilities claimed in Florida in 2016 (and continue to claim around the country today) that allowing solar customers to sell power back to the grid actually costs non-solar customers more money, solar advocates in Florida presented a report published in May 2016 by the Brookings Institution that effectively refuted this utility claim.⁷

According to the Brookings report and several other reports about solar net metering done in various states, the reality was the opposite: distributed solar provides value worth more to the grid than what solar homeowners are paid for their excess power through net metering.

Clean power sold back to the grid by rooftop solar owners helps non-solar customers by reducing the need to build new power plants, cutting demand for fossil fuels to generate power, and reducing the need for expensive maintenance on the grid. All that helps lower utility rates and increase energy security, saving utility customers money and giving them more reliable power, even if they don’t use solar themselves.

As the Brookings report concluded, “The economic benefits of net metering actually outweigh the costs and impose no significant cost increase for non-solar customers.

Far from a net cost, net metering is in most cases a net benefit — for the utility and for non-solar rate-payers.”

After the recording of consultant Sal Nuzzo’s remarks about Amendment 1 was released in the middle of October, public support for the utility-sponsored ballot measure dropped drastically. And by the time election day came on November 8, the deceptive initiative failed to get the 60% of votes required under Florida’s constitution to become law.

It was solar patriots from across the political spectrum who won this victory. Under the umbrella of Floridians for Solar Choice, a diverse coalition of 200 grassroots groups including solar companies along with both environmentalists and the Florida Tea Party, helped citizens to see the truth that Amendment 1 would set back the cause of solar in the Sunshine State by decades.

“Today, as a coalition representing every part of Florida’s political spectrum, we defeated one of the most egregious and underhanded attempts at voter manipulation in this state’s history,” said Tory Perfetti, who served as both chairman of Floridians for Solar Choice and as director of Conservatives for Energy Freedom, in a statement. “We won against all odds and secured a victory for energy freedom.”

Despite all the myth-busting of the pro-solar forces, many Florida voters were still fooled by the utilities’ propaganda campaign. More than 4.5 million Floridians,

accounting for 50.8 percent of all voters, actually voted in favor of Amendment 1. Clearly, though the utilities’ campaign wasn’t good enough to get the 60 percent of votes it needed to make Amendment 1 law, it was enough to deceive a majority of good citizens in Florida to vote against their own desire for more rooftop solar.

Solar Must Fight Back with Its Own Language

The Florida vote may have been a victory for rooftop solar in 2016, but it was not the end of the utilities’ strategy to protect their monopoly by trying to confuse the public with tricky language. Just as the utility industry’s Lexicon Project’s Orwellian Newspeak helped deceive voters and policymakers in Florida when it was put into legislation in the form of Amendment 1, so the utility industry’s devil’s dictionary could also help utilities crush competition for solar among consumers in other states and on the federal level in the future.

If things go well for utilities and their language games, pretty soon solar installers can expect their potential customers to start asking about whether “private solar” (i.e., a rooftop array) is really right for them, or if they should just wait for “universal solar” from their utility.

After all, if solar is about doing the right thing, then who wants to be selfish and hog all the solar for themselves?

If homeowners and business owners start to believe utility propaganda, it could be disastrous for rooftop solar.

Nick Stumo-Langer of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance suggests that the solar industry should offer its own list of word changes to put utilities in their place. He’s got a handy and entertaining list:

Instead of...	Use...
Utility	Incumbent monopoly
Fixed charge	Monopoly protection fee
Cost-shift	Non-monopoly benefits
Baseload generation	Inflexible generation

It would be more accurate for solar homeowners to adopt Stumo-Langer’s list when they talk to their family, friends, and neighbors and elected officials alike. But more importantly, anyone who supports rooftop solar should not be intimidated by the utility lobby’s campaign to corrupt the English language.

If anyone was being selfish in Florida’s battle over Amendment 1, it was not solar homeowners. It was really the opposite. Homeowners who invested their own money to install solar panels on their rooftops and sold their excess energy back to the grid were the ones helping their neighbors to enjoy some of the benefits of clean solar energy. The selfish ones in this case were the electric utilities who

put their own profits ahead of the wellbeing of Florida’s citizens while seeking to deceive the public into voting against their own desire for more solar.

We all need to stand up for the integrity of words used to talk about energy and do our part to educate the people we know with the truth about rooftop solar—that it’s one of the most patriotic ways to help America today. That’s what the next chapter will discuss.



FROM THE REVOLUTION: THE ARROGANCE OF KING GEORGE III

Someday, given the distance between Britain and America, it was inevitable that Britain's thirteen colonies from New England to Georgia would want their independence. But it was the actions of King George III (reigned 1760-1820) that caused Americans to revolt in the second half of the 18th century and ultimately led to American independence in 1776.

The trouble began when the British started imposing taxes on Americans to buy items ranging from lead to paper to tea. These taxes were not imposed on people in Britain. Even worse, the new duties passed without the Americans' consent, as we saw in the previous chapter. To protect their freedoms, at first, Americans sought redress from these imposed taxes, sending respectful petitions to the King. But as George III's government imposed ever more taxes and then came up with other ways to extract revenue from the colonies such as quartering troops in private homes, Americans turned to rebellion against imperial rule.

Encouraged by hardline advisors such as Prime Minister Lord Frederick North, the headstrong George III refused to compromise with the colonists. When the Americans published the Declaration of Independence in 1776, they

didn't just blame the British government, but they blamed the King specifically for their grievances. "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states."

One of the grievances against George III mentioned in the Declaration of Independence was sending foreign mercenaries—the Hessians whom Washington would beat at the Battle of Trenton after crossing the Delaware—to "complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny... totally unworthy of the head of a civilized nation." In the same way, in 2016, electric utilities in Florida used the front group Consumers for Smart Solar to do their dirty work for them in convincing voters through deception that the anti-solar Amendment 1 was actually good for solar.

In the end, George III wouldn't compromise with the Americans, and yet he wasn't able to muster enough force to suppress the colonists' revolt against imperial rule either. In the same way, the momentum behind solar power is so great today that no cabal of monopoly utilities can stop solar from becoming America's top energy source at some point.

But using their money to fool the public and influence government, utilities can certainly slow down rooftop solar for decades. Yet, in coming years, when solar + battery storage becomes more affordable, homeowners can simply defect from the electric grid, perhaps even putting

utilities out of business. That means utilities now have a choice. They can compromise with solar homeowners and find a way to make peace. Or, they can continue to fight rooftop solar, and risk losing their control over America's electricity system altogether, meeting much the same fate as King George III, whose stubbornness helped him to lose his American empire.

Three

WHY SOLAR IS PATRIOTIC

*There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty,
that makes human nature rise above
itself, in acts of bravery and heroism.*

—ALEXANDER HAMILTON

If you accept that patriotism is a love for the place where you live that always tries to make that place better, then it's easy to see how helping to spread solar power around the country is one of the most patriotic things you can do for America today.

Everybody knows that America has an energy problem. No matter how cheap they may be today, prices for the fossil fuels that provide most of our energy have