

The worst of these offensive laws suspended the self-government that Massachusetts had enjoyed under its colonial charter since the days of the Pilgrims. The British also closed the busy port of Boston to all trade until the Bostonians would repay the cost of the drowned tea, destroying the livelihood of thousands of citizens of the city. Anger at this extreme response helped provoke Americans to unite across colonies in the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in the fall of that year.

More than two centuries after independence, Americans have continued to take inspiration from the Tea Party's protest against British rule to stand up for their freedoms against entrenched domestic powers. Perhaps the most famous was the Tea Party movement that elected a slate of protest-minded Republicans to Congress in 2010. Today, that same movement has joined the fight for solar rights.

One of America's leading advocates for solar homeowners is Debbie Dooley, leader of the Georgia Tea Party Patriots and founder of the innovative Green Tea Coalition. Dooley became famous nationwide when she led a successful effort in 2013 to require utilities in Georgia to buy more power from solar homeowners. Later, in Florida in 2016, she helped lead the alliance of solar companies, homeowners, environmental groups, conservative activists, and others to defeat Florida's deceptive Amendment 1, which we discussed in Chapter 2.

Five

THE JOY OF GETTING INVOLVED

The consciousness of having discharged that duty which we owe to our country is superior to all other considerations.

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

It can be energizing to step outside yourself and commit to something larger. And what can be bigger than helping Americans win freedom from dirty energy, protecting the future of both our own country and the whole world?

When you start talking with people you know about solar power, you may notice that their ears perk up. Americans are a practical people who admire those who have found a better way to make money or save money.

But we're also an idealistic people who want to do our part to make life better for everybody. Few Americans quit their jobs to pursue a life dedicated only to helping others. But when we see an opportunity to make a difference while also helping ourselves, then many of us will be intrigued. That's why it's a such great idea to talk to your friends about solar.

From Small Talk to Solar Talk

Talking about something that goes beyond the usual casual conversations about sports or vacations may make you stand out a bit from the people you know. And that might take you to the edge of your comfort zone.

So, if you feel that you need permission to become a more public advocate for rooftop solar, then consider this book that permission.

But really, if you have already gone solar at home, then you don't need anyone's permission to stand up tall and proud for solar power. You've proven your commitment. And since most people do a lot of research on solar before they get their own solar panels, you probably already know more about solar power than most of your neighbors, family, and friends—and most other people in America too.

The beauty of the American system as set up by our nation's founders is that you don't need permission from

anybody to get more involved. As a citizen, you are sovereign. The government works for you, not the other way around. If you feel that the government is not working well for rooftop solar these days in Washington, DC or in your state capital, then you have the right to ask for change.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees “the right of the people...to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

So, if you feel that utilities are using government as a tool to try to kill or slow down rooftop solar, then you have a right to demand that your government change course and start listening to citizens who want more solar power that they make themselves instead of dirty energy from monopoly utilities.

If you want to help spread solar around America, lobbying elected officials is one of the most powerful things you can do. If you're not ready for that, of course there are other things you can do to help, from just talking about solar with people you know to sending referrals to your solar installer. But I'd ask you first to simply consider how much more gratifying it might be for you to become a citizen lobbyist for solar power.

You already know how satisfying it is to get your own power from the sun, instead of having to buy it from an electric utility. Danny Kennedy, whose book *Rooftop Revolution* I mentioned earlier (and which I strongly recommend) explained to me that “Being able to tap a source

of power fresh from the sky every day is the ultimate form of freedom, to be secure in what we need and not have one of those critical dependencies on gas or coal.” Going solar essentially raises your status from a “dumb consumer who’s just trapped in the system” to a producer of energy, one of the most important services of modern civilization.

Solar homeowners can take that liberation to the next level by becoming advocates for solar, Kennedy says. “They’re citizens and the ultimate form of activism in our democracy is to fight for the right to treat your home as your castle and run it as you want. You want to get fair value for the solar power you produce. Homeowners can be the best agitators for solar to operate effectively in the market.”

Yet, you might think that you can’t make a difference. Maybe you think the system is so corrupt that ordinary citizens can’t have much influence over politicians, who pay more attention to special interests like utility companies that make large donations to their campaigns. If you think that elected officials won’t pay much attention to an ordinary solar homeowner, then you may wonder if there’s any point to lobbying.

Well, just remember what happened in Nevada. There, solar homeowners made all the difference, handing a massive defeat to the powerful monopoly utility NV Energy when it attacked net metering and tried to add high discriminatory charges only for solar owners. What it took

to turn back the utility’s attack against good solar policies was for homeowners to get involved. And those neighbors had to be willing to work together across traditional political divides to join the same party—the rooftop solar party, that is.

Solar Unites Progressives and Conservatives

Meanwhile, in the last few years it seems that America has become divided into two nations, where conservatives and progressives can hardly agree on anything. Issues like abortion, healthcare, and taxes have always been contentious. But these days it seems that we’re letting our differences of opinion in one area keep us from talking about anything else. Some historians say that the country hasn’t been split this badly since the Vietnam War or even since before the Civil War. And we all know what happened back then.

Today, we may not be facing the threat of armed conflict between different regions of the country as the United States faced in 1861 or even the unrest of the 1960s. But it’s a serious problem when Americans with different perspectives can’t work well together to find compromises on the big problems that face the country. And one of America’s biggest challenges will be to find enough clean energy to protect our economy and our way of life in the future.

Fortunately, both conservatives and progressives support rooftop solar. Solar patriots can only win the clean energy revolution against entrenched monopoly utilities and fossil fuel interests if we are willing to cooperate with citizens who may disagree with us on other issues but share a common passion for solar power.

It's natural for well-educated and well-informed citizens to disagree on what's needed to make America better. Yet, until we have a good reason to think otherwise, it's only fair to assume that we all have good motivations. In my experience, though progressives and conservatives want to take different roads to get there, we all want to reach the same destination: a country that is free and fair, prosperous and secure, offering opportunities for everyone to thrive in a natural environment with a stable climate and clean air, water, and land.

As Thomas Jefferson said, "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle."

You probably already know that progressives from Al Gore to the Sierra Club to the Democratic mayors of major cities like New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco are big advocates of solar power.

But you may not have heard that a growing number of conservatives and Republicans also want to see America put up more solar panels. Let's look at just a few examples here of what some conservative leaders have to say about

solar power, especially when it's on your roof and it's not owned by a utility company.

Earlier, we learned how former South Carolina Congressman Bob Inglis, who we first encountered in Chapter 3, converted from climate science skeptic to climate activist.

Seeing the scientific evidence for himself was a big part of getting Inglis to change his mind. And his religious faith was a motivation for Inglis to start to do his part to protect God's creation. Ever since he became an advocate for climate solutions, Inglis has had the chance to talk to thousands of people from across the political spectrum about climate and energy. Based on this experience, Inglis told me about the different terms that progressives and conservatives—the blue and red teams—use to talk about solar.

"The blue team will talk about cleaning the air. The red team will say that solar is an opportunity for real freedom and the opportunity to turn one's roof into a productive asset and to get off the grid and to move beyond monopolistic power companies. When we get the ability to cost-effectively store that energy and put it in our cars we'll be able to say to the Middle East hey, you can drink that stuff [i.e., oil]. All those things are high-octane conservatism."

Michele Combs also lives in South Carolina, where she founded a group that has now gone nationwide, Young Conservatives for Energy Reform. She thinks that solar appeals to conservatives regardless of age. "With solar it's

very appealing to conservatives because you control your energy. The government is not controlling it, but you actually control it yourself. Utility companies definitely are a monopoly,” Combs told me.

Compared to many older conservatives, in her experience younger voters on the right give a higher priority to protecting the environment and fighting climate change. But the economic opportunity of solar and other clean energy is what attracts the young conservatives to Combs’ organization.

“The thing that’s really appealing to the young people now is jobs. Clean energy jobs are the way of the future. I live in Charleston, South Carolina, and out of 300 houses in my area, probably 50 of them have solar panels.” Combs hopes to go solar at her own home soon, and a generous state tax credit in South Carolina will make it more affordable. Meanwhile, she’s working to raise energy awareness among young conservatives across America.

“We have a summit every year in the fall. We bring in Republican legislators and industry leaders who talk to young leaders about going back to their states. There are great things going on all over the country that people in Washington, DC don’t know about. I see it trickling up to the federal level.”

As to public policy to encourage solar, Combs supports solar tax credits as well as a carbon fee to make fossil fuels pay more of their own way. Overall, she wants action at the federal level.

“I think we first have to come up with a comprehensive energy bill that will give clean energy the same amount of funding as other types of energy. We will somehow have to come up with a way to come off of fossil fuels, maybe in our children’s lifetimes. We’ll have to be more energy efficient and energy independent.”

Mark Fleming is CEO of Conservatives for Clean Energy, based in Raleigh, North Carolina. He told me that conservatives like solar for economic reasons—jobs, energy independence, and competition. “Conservatives generally don’t like big. They don’t like big government. They are suspicious of a monopoly utility system. When you get the debate to that level you find a strong conservative support for anything that creates competition. The more we can help drive that conversation the better.”

Ash Mason is Southeastern Regional Director at the Christian Coalition of America, a group founded in 1989 by Pat Robertson that became famous for mobilizing evangelical Christians to get involved in politics on such issues as fighting abortion. Now one of the largest grassroots organizations in the country, the Christian Coalition has added a new issue to its top five core concerns—rooftop solar.

“The Christian Coalition and Christians in general have always admired the things that make us a family,” Mason told me. “Having to decide between paying the electric bill and putting food on the table are important decisions. We want to make those choices easier.”

He would like to start a new mission to help churches install solar panels that can provide solar power both for the church itself and for low-income parishioners.

“Many churches move into old warehouse buildings that are perfect for solar arrays. If we can equip these churches with the ability to be energy efficient and no longer worry about a power bill then they can spend more on the ministry. Then, what if they can sell energy back into the grid? We can create a Light Credit to help those who can’t afford their own power bills.”

Mason is a bit of a gear-head when it comes to solar equipment. He wears a solar-powered wrist watch, and likes to talk about the latest PowerWall battery system from Tesla, as well as solar shingles and nanotechnology films that could replace crystalline solar panels in the future. Mason even earned a certificate in renewable energy management from North Carolina State University.

“I am really interested in the technology and so I feel I need to be able to explain how it works. That’s why I went to seminary originally, so I can explain what I believe. I believe in giving God’s honest truth and letting people make up their own mind. Hopefully that’s what leaders will get back to in the future.”

To learn that conservatives seem to support rooftop solar as much as progressives do is encouraging.

Bipartisan support for rooftop solar and clean energy means that there is a practical path to solve our energy and climate crisis where everybody can win. And that’s good news to help solve America’s political crisis. Perhaps solar could be an issue that helps bridge today’s partisan divides and brings Americans with different views together around values that we all share: personal freedom, energy independence, and prosperity.

Renewable energy is already a big issue, promising benefits from climate solutions to energy independence. But solar power could also do more for America. It could help make the political climate less stormy.

Working to spread rooftop solar could bring people together across the political spectrum in a positive, cooperative way. This could help reduce the partisanship that bedevils American politics today, the very same contentiousness that George Washington himself warned against in his famous Farwell Address in 1796:

The spirit of party...serves always to distract the Public Councils and enfeeble the Public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated

access to the government itself through the channels of party passions.

Politically, solar could help unite Americans at a time when we are dangerously far apart. Future generations will surely be grateful for the work of today's solar patriots to bridge partisan divides and help people on both the left and the right to put country ahead of party.

Standing Up for Solar in a Way that Works for Your Personality

Getting involved in spreading rooftop solar around America will not only protect your investment in solar at home for the future. It could also be just what the country needs to start solving our biggest problems again.

That's a big opportunity to make a difference. But you may also think it's a bit too big. If you don't have any experience lobbying elected officials, you might wonder if you're up to it. Or maybe lobbying just isn't your thing. Either way, don't worry. There are plenty of other things besides talking to government officials that you can do to help spread solar.

You can start by just talking to your neighbors, family, and friends. Then, if you feel comfortable, you can start referring people you know who are interested in going

solar to your solar installation company. Finally, once you've done some of those things, you may be ready to try your hand at a bit of citizen lobbying, by writing a letter to the editor or calling the office of your member of Congress.

So, if you're ready to get started, let's look at these options for you to get involved. We'll begin with the easy stuff and then we'll work our way up to more challenging (and rewarding) ways to stand up for solar rights. But first we'll see what lessons the American Revolution has for us on getting involved!



FROM THE REVOLUTION: BATTLES OF LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

The first battles of the American Revolution, known as “the shots heard around the world,” took place in the Massachusetts towns of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Still angry about the Tea Act and other British impositions on their local sovereignty, Americans around the colonies started to conclude that the only way to protect their rights was to throw off British rule and create an independent nation. Spurred by the Sons of Liberty, colonists in New England led the way by stockpiling arms for the day when open war would break out.

That day came when British General Thomas Gage, in his base in Boston, learned of a weapons cache held by patriots in Concord. He issued an order to his forces to march west of the city to confiscate the weapons cache in Concord and any other caches they might find in towns along the way. Patriots in Boston learned of the order, and sent Paul Revere on his legendary ride to warn the patriots of Concord and nearby towns that “the British are coming.”

Forewarned was forearmed, and by the time the column of 700 British soldiers reached Lexington on April 19, seventy Minutemen were waiting for them. After a tense standoff on Lexington Green between local patriots and

the far larger British force, a shot was fired by an unknown gun, and widespread shooting began. A similar scene was repeated later that day when the British reached nearby Concord.

More than a year later and after more armed engagements including the Battle of Bunker Hill outside of Boston, the colonists would formally break with the British crown and declare their independence.

For today’s solar patriots, attacks on net metering by Arizona utilities were the Lexington and Concord of the battle to protect solar rights, according to Court Rich, an attorney involved in solar policy.

“In the early battles, you learn about your opponents and their strategies,” Rich told a solar industry conference in 2017. The nationwide fight over net metering began in Arizona.

In 2013, the Arizona Corporation Commission became the first regulatory body in a major solar market to allow a utility (Arizona Public Service) to impose a discriminatory charge on solar system owners. Utilities took these attacks from Arizona into other states including Nevada and Florida, as we’ve seen. But solar patriots in those states fought back—and like our scrappy forefathers, they won!