

EARTH TALK™

Questions & Answers About Our Environment

Dear EarthTalk: Is it true that home rooftop solar only makes sense in certain parts of the U.S. with proper incentives as opposed to where the sun shines the most?

-- Esther Knox, Wilton, NH

The short answer is yes. In the United States, whether or not it is easy and economical to go solar depends more on state politics than prevailing weather trends.

In those states with ample sunshine and the legislative initiative to get solar panels on residential roofs, there has never been a better—or cheaper—time to put photovoltaic panels to use.

According to Solar Power Rocks, a website that helps homeowners understand the rules, incentives, and investment returns on local solar panel installations, the top three states where switching over to solar power makes the most economic sense are in the Northeast (New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut). Maryland, Connecticut, Oregon, Minnesota, New

Mexico, Vermont, and Colorado round out the top 10.

What makes these states particularly prime for rooftop solar is their willingness to allow homeowners to lease photovoltaic equipment from third-party owners (like Sun Edison, Solar City, Sun Run, etc.) and legislature-backed incentives to help keep costs down overall. Going solar in one of these states might end up being cheaper than remaining on the grid.

Surprisingly, a few states in the South (Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Kentucky), where solar panels would seem like a no-brainer, continue to resist this change for the better, in large part due to entrenched utility lobbies intent on maintaining their fossil-fuel-based lock on the status quo.

According to a recent *Rolling Stone* article by Tim Dickinson, the recent ascent of solar power in the U.S. poses a grave threat to the business interests of big fossil fuel industry investors.

Dickinson details how these entrenched interests are “mounting a fierce, rear-guard resistance at the state level—pushing rate hikes and punishing fees for homeowners who turn to solar power.”

He adds that their efforts have “darkened green-energy prospects in could-be solar superpowers” like Arizona and Nevada. “But nowhere has the solar industry been more eclipsed than in Florida, where the utilities’ powers of obstruction are unrivaled.”



The best three states across the U.S. for putting solar panels on the roof are in the Northeast. (Photo by Nick Normal, FlickrCC)

“The solar industry in Florida has been boxed out by investor-owned utilities that reap massive profits from natural gas and coal,” reports Dickinson. “These IOUs wield outsize political power in the state capital of Tallahassee, and flex it to protect their absolute monopoly on electricity sales.”

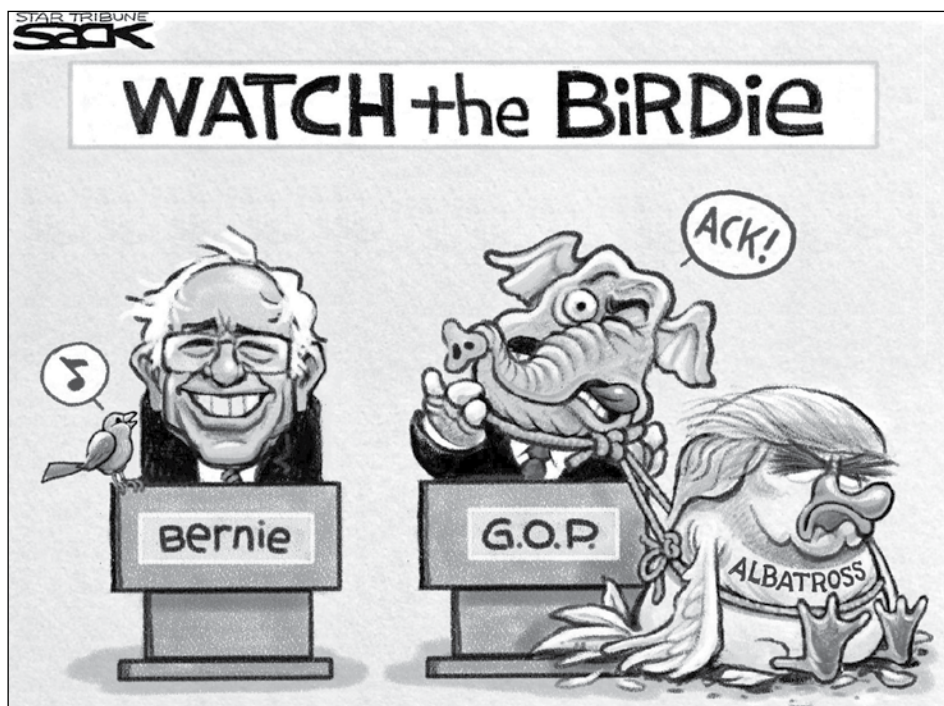
While Florida might be a laggard on rooftop solar for now, that could all change if some residents are successful in their drive for an amendment to the state constitution to allow for third-party solar ownership (which would enable solar leasing).

Of course, the state’s utilities have challenged the amendment by creating their own, designed to confuse voters into keeping solar panels off their rooftops.

For more information on where your state stands in terms on rooftop solar, check out Solar Power Rocks 2016 U.S. Solar Power Rankings. Also, visit the website of the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency for a full run-down of state-by-state, federal and other incentives for installing solar panels and other forms of renewable energy equipment.

Contacts: Solar Power Rocks, www.solarpowerrocks.com; Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency, www.dsireusa.org.

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