**Five Takeaways from a NC Energy Policy Panel**

By Phil Martindale

May 15, 2018

I attended the [The Jesse Helms Center](https://jessehelmscenter.org/)’s 30th Anniversary Lecture Series on Friday, May 11. Topics at these lectures include free enterprise, foreign policy, trade, and national security. This year was the first event to include a panel discussion on the future of energy in America. During an intermission, I met Senator Burr and was impressed by his interest in and knowledge of the solar industry, especially as it pertains to North Carolina. As a solar professional, I was eager to learn from policy experts and government officials about the future of solar in North Carolina and beyond. Here are five takeaways from the event:

* **The US is on the cusp of energy independence**

Dan Brouillette (US Department of Energy) explained that the US is now the number one producer of oil and gas in the world. New fracking technologies and the ability to export LNG have enabled us to achieve this feat. The US now produces 10 million barrels of [crude](https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/US-Sets-New-Monthly-Oil-Production-Record.html) oil a day. Domestic energy production accounts for over [91%](https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/?page=us_energy_home) of US energy consumption. This number will continue to move closer to 100% in coming years. Energy independence allows our leaders to negotiate from a position of power in foreign negotiations.

* **Corporations are improving their Triple Bottom Line**

Corporations like Target, Walmart, and Home Depot are improving their social, environmental, and economical impacts without the government forcing them. [Target](https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/planet) has an impressive recycling program that has saved hundreds of millions of plastic bags from ending up in landfills and has outfitted hundreds of stores with [rooftop solar](https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/goals-reporting#environment). More companies are reducing their carbon footprints because there is significant consumer interest and cost savings.

* **Clean energy is relative**

All energy sources affect the environment in some way; therefore, there is no such thing as a completely “clean” energy source. Sarah Hunt (Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy) prefers to look at the topic as combustion versus zero emission. Renewable energy like wind and solar are not toxic to the air or land, but they do have costs associated with manufacturing and installation that must be taken into account. In order to [make a solar module](https://www.solarworld-usa.com/solar-101/making-solar-panels), the silicon must be heated to ~2,577 degrees Fahrenheit which requires energy. When compared to burning hydrocarbons, solar and wind energy are relatively [clean](http://energy4me.org/all-about-energy/sustainability/environmental-impact-by-source/) sources of energy.

* **Energy diversity remains critically important**

One of the panelists, Joseph Majkut (Niskanen Center) posed the question, “What are we looking for from our energy?” It is general consensus that we want our energy to be reliable, affordable, and clean. Clean can be debated, but at the end of the day, no one wants a nuclear power plant in their backyard. A successful strategy to achieve these goals involves diversifying our energy mix to mitigate risk. In 2017, the US [produced](https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=427&t=3) 62.7% of its energy from fossil fuels, 20% from nuclear, 17.1% from renewables, and 0.3% from other sources. For comparison, renewables accounted for only 7.3% of US [production](https://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/annual/archive/038408.pdf) in 2008. I hope this priority continues to gain traction.

* **NC Senators support solar**

North Carolina leads the way in US solar production, second behind only California in total MW installed. The industry has seen great growth over the last decade, both locally and nationwide, but job growth t halted in 2017 due to a 30% tariff on foreign silicon modules. Last week, a group of senators include NC’s own Richard Burr and Thom Tillis, signed and delivered a [letter](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-11/gop-senators-want-to-exempt-giant-solar-farm-panels-from-tariffs) to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, Energy Secretary Rick Perry, and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, asking for a duty pardon on utility scale 72 cell, 1,500 volt modules. Their leadership and support is critical to the continued growth of the solar industry.

The US is leading the way in energy production, and Americans want companies to act sustainably. Enterprises are improving their triple bottom line without the government forcing them. As such, our democratic representatives see the value that solar has been to the state and are fighting to support the industry. We are entering a new era of corporate responsibility and energy independence in America. We boast a diverse mix of energy sources and renewables now account for 17% of domestic production. I am proud to be a part of that growth! Please feel free to join the discussion on America’s energy future by leaving a comment below.

Want to discuss how to reduce your carbon footprint by improving your triple bottom line? Ready to offset carbon emissions and lower your utility bill? Reach me at [PMartindale@Axis-EnergyInc.com](mailto:PMartindale@Axis-EnergyInc.com); I’m happy to answer any questions.