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Federal Overreach Jeopardizes Iowa Solar Industry

Petition Filed at FERC Would Eliminate State Jurisdiction of Energy Market

IOWA - A dark-money group called the New England Ratepayers Association (NERA) filed a petition in April asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to overrule how energy is generated in states. If the special interest lobbyists are successful, FERC would treat farmers with solar on their land or homeowners with solar on their roof the same as large power plants.

“This extraordinary federal overreach would effectively kill Iowa’s solar market and the nearly 1,000 jobs supported by our industry,” said Tim Dwight, President of the Iowa Solar Energy Trade Association. “Our industry spent the past year working with utilities, agriculture groups, businesses and environmentalists to find energy solutions that work for all Iowans. Unfortunately, the progress and groundbreaking legislation of Senate File 583 is now at risk if FERC chooses to stomp on state rights and eliminate Iowa’s ability to implement it.”

The federal government has historically only had jurisdiction over energy issues when they cross state lines. NERA’s petition, if successful, would take away state regulation of net metering and give it to the federal government. This goes beyond FERC’s traditional authority and enables the agency to declare exclusive federal jurisdiction over any energy put on the grid.

“Our company has helped countless Iowa businesses, farmers and homeowners control their energy costs through solar innovation,” said Troy Van Beek, CEO of Ideal Energy based in Fairfield. “NERA’s petition would not only be devastating to their bottom line, but it would close the doors of our business and put our 30 employees out of work. Companies like ours have brought good-paying jobs to rural Iowa, and a special interest group from the East Coast shouldn’t have the ability to dictate Iowa’s energy market.”

The petition does not include a grandfathering clause, which means the agreements between current Iowa solar customers and their utilities would be obsolete. This would be devastating to the small businesses, farmers and homeowners that have invested in solar, especially Iowa pork producers who are already reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only have they already invested in solar energy projects on their farms, they would also lose the value of their investment and pay higher utility bills.

“Energy is one of the biggest costs to running a business,” said Jenny Steffensmeier, President of Steffensmeier Welding and Manufacturing. “Investing in solar enabled us to stabilize our costs, and reinvest our savings back into our people and community. The NERA petition would not only harm businesses that have invested in solar, it would have a negative ripple effect on the company’s ability to hire and help its community.”

The deadline to submit comments for the case, Docket # EL20-42-000, is June 15, 2020. Iowa solar customers and supporters can provide comments at savesolar.org.

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*The **Iowa Solar Energy Trade Association** is the trade association serving Iowa’s solar energy industry and is dedicated to excellence in safety, quality of workmanship and technical standards for the benefit of the photovoltaic industry and its clients in the state of Iowa through public policy, public relations and education. Learn more at www.iowaseta.org.*