

# **GOP lawmakers say community solar bill would reduce energy rates**

Posted on Thursday, Apr 6, 2023

Republican advocates for community solar in Wisconsin say their bill would lead to lower energy rates through competition while getting more local buy-in for projects.

During a recent joint appearance on WisconsinEye, Sen. Duey Stroebel and Rep. Scott Krug touted legislation they're reintroducing that would allow customers to subscribe to a community solar facility and get credits on their electricity bill.

According to an overview from WisEye, subscriber organizations wouldn't need to be utilities and projects would need to pass local government bodies with a two-thirds majority vote. Plus, the state Public Service Commission would establish rates for the customer bill credits based on the costs and benefits of the solar facility in question.

Stroebel said the bill would allow more avenues for power generation other than the state's large investor-owned utilities.

"It creates competition, and competition creates more affordable rates, and that's really what we need in the state of Wisconsin," the Saukville Republican said. "Because our energy rates are high compared to others in the Midwest, and this is part of a solution to fix that problem."

Utilities in the state are opposed to the legislation, with the Wisconsin Utilities Association arguing in a statement it would "chiefly benefit the out-of-state community solar developers at the expense of" non-subscribing energy customers.

"Meanwhile, the developers would benefit from using Wisconsin's electric grid with no obligation to maintain service and reliability, to prove the generating asset is necessary or cost effective, or to be a provider of last resort, as Wisconsin's utilities are required to do," the group said last month.

Krug noted Wisconsin remains a net importer of energy, arguing allowing community solar projects would expand access in both rural and urban areas while

adding more energy to the grid. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the state consumes nearly six times as much energy as it produces.

While more solar projects are being developed in Wisconsin, solar still makes up less than 1 percent of the state's overall energy mix, PSC figures show. Krug highlighted rising demand for more renewable energy in the state, and blamed that low figure on regulatory restrictions.

"Right now, the ability for people to do more is hindered by regulation, and that's the problem we have right now," the Nekoosa lawmaker said, adding the bill would "get rates to the point where everybody can afford it" and give landowners more options for making money.

He also noted each project would be linked to the community through an "anchor" facility, which could be a grocery store, school, or small- to medium-sized employer. Because local residents could buy into these projects to reduce their electricity bills, Krug argued projects will benefit the entire community.

"This is a win-win option for all of Wisconsin, because you've got all the political sides that should be there coming together," he said. "The far left on the green side, and the far right on the open market type people. All open to this idea, and this concept around the country that 22 other states are already doing. It's just time for us to kind of jump in on the same thing."

Still, Stroebel acknowledged the bill doesn't have bipartisan support. But he said "we can get there" as lawmakers learn more about the bill. He said it's supported by organizations in Wisconsin representing farmers and grocers, pointing to a "large contingency" of backers.

Watch the full interview:

<https://wiseye.org/2023/04/04/newsmakers-solar-energy-and-community-solar-in-wisconsin/>

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