

OTHER VIEWS

Growth of state's solar industry in jeopardy

By RHONE RESCH

Earlier this year, North Carolina became just the fourth state in the nation to top 1,000 megawatts (MW) of installed solar capacity, trailing only California, Arizona and New Jersey as America's solar leaders. But despite the state's rapid progress, the looming expiration of the federal investment tax credit (ITC) for solar energy is creating angst in the marketplace, threatening to eliminate good-paying jobs statewide.

It's no coincidence that North Carolina is ranked No. 1 in the entire South in installed solar capacity. Effective public policies, like the state's investment tax credit (ITC), renewable energy portfolio standards (RPS) and the federal ITC, are paying huge dividends for the state's economy, creating thousands of new jobs and generating hundreds of millions of dollars a year in economic activity.

Powered by a booming utility-scale market, North Carolina added 58 MW of new solar capacity in the first quarter of this year, bringing its statewide total to 1,011 MW — enough to power nearly 110,000 homes. Most impressively, the 58 MW added represents a robust 66 percent increase over the same quarter last year.

The report went on to point out that North Carolina had increases in Q1 across all solar sectors, with installed residential and commercial system prices dropping 12 percent in the last year — and down nearly 50 percent since 2010. All totaled, \$95 million was invested in North Carolina in the first quarter in new solar installations — and \$747 million since the beginning of 2014.

A lot of this economic activity is a direct result of the federal investment tax credit. Consider what's occurred since it was enacted in 2006: 150,000 new solar jobs have been added across America; enough new solar has come online to power 4 million homes; more than \$66 billion has been invested in new solar installations; and one-third of all new electricity added to the U.S. grid last year came from solar.

North Carolina has benefitted greatly from this ramped up activity, with thousands of new jobs being created statewide. To put North Carolina's remarkable progress in some context, the 1,011 MW of solar installed in the state today is twice as much as the entire country had in 2004!

Currently, there are 177 solar companies at work throughout the value chain in North Carolina, employing more than 5,600 people. What's more, from an environmental perspective, solar installations in North Carolina are helping to offset more than 1 million metric tons of harmful carbon emissions, which is the equivalent of removing 200,000 cars off the state's roads and highways.

As it stands now, the 30 percent federal ITC will expire at the end of 2016, threatening to derail the rapid progress solar energy is making across North Carolina. By contrast, competing energy sources, such as fossil fuels, have had preferential treatment in the U.S. tax code for up to 100 years, while solar has had the federal ITC as an incentive for private investment for less than 10.

As an industry, we're strongly urging North Carolina's Congressional delegation to support extending the ITC for at least five years. By then, many analysts are predicting, solar will reach grid parity in most electricity markets, helping to create a level playing field among energy producers, which will benefit consumers, the U.S. economy and our environment. That's a win-win in anyone's book.

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ON THE RECORD

Too early for college football picks

With local baseball at sunset this time of year, high school football still non-contact in T-shirts and the summer doldrums for the pros coming before the start of NFL training camps, that can only mean one thing:

College football prediction-time is here.

My crystal ball is as fuzzy as it can get: I predicted Florida State would repeat as national champions despite the new Final-Four format, and at least they made it that far.

This year, based on the police blotter, the Seminoles may not make it out of the ACC.

But before I crown Georgia Tech, witness the resurrection of Virginia Tech, and declare Pitt running back James Conner as a bona fide Heisman Trophy candidate despite the Panthers' lackluster schedule (and, no, I haven't forgotten that Notre Dame's Everett Golson has transferred to FSU) — I want to tell you who I think will be the top-dog among the Big-Four (delete Wake, insert ECU).

Looking at the way last season ended and taking into account the returning offensive talent at State and Carolina, the balance of power in the ol' North State could be shifting once more.

Duke's been the top dog the last two years, even though the Devils slipped a bit last year. Duke won't play N.C. State this season and for the first time in years, ECU won't be in a scheduling position to humiliate its ACC in-state brethren (you may exhale now Carolina fans).

If you believe in the 'Big Mo', and that momentum carries over then clap for the Wolf man. No one closed out 2014 hotter than N.C. State; and this was a team that hadn't even won an ACC game under second year coach Dave Doeren until they



GENE MOTLEY

State's 35-7 win at Carolina — repeat, 'AT' Carolina — might have been proof enough, but then the Pack won the Bitcoin Bowl (the what??) over a Central Florida team that had just stunned ECU in Greenville with a Hail Mary on Senior Night that denied the Pirates the All-American Conference title their rookie season in the league.

Maybe it was a hangover effect, but the Bucs let Florida off the hook in the Birmingham Bowl; Duke absorbed the Sun Bowl loss from Arizona State and Carolina wound up a losing overall record — 6-7 — after its bowl fiasco in Blue Heaven-friendly Charlotte against Rutgers (who??).

The Heels' defense should be better under Gene Chizik. He does have a national championship under his belt from Auburn thanks to Cam Newton.

Meanwhile, on the offensive side, both State's Jacoby Brissett and UNC's Marquise Williams have to be the top returning quarterbacks since there'll be new starters at both Duke and ECU; and the Pirates will be breaking in some more offensive body parts.

Our ACC trio probably won't be challenging any of the league's

bumped off Syracuse, and they didn't do that until the leaves had fallen in November. Still, State went 4-1 beginning with the win over the Orange, and finished 8-5. Sure they had blowout wins over South Florida and Presbyterian, but a strong finish is a strong finish.

heavyweights: not the Heels and Duke against the likes of Georgia Tech or Virginia Tech in the Atlantic Division; and I'll say ditto for the Wolfpack on the Coastal side against Clemson, or Florida State and maybe even longshot, Miami.

Over in the AAC, despite a reasonably solid defense, the ECU newcomers on offense — including their coordinator now that Lincoln Riley's off to Oklahoma to be on Bob Stoops' staff — have me picking the Pirates no better than third behind Central Florida and Cincinnati in their division. I am, however, looking forward to seeing what they do down at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium in Gainesville when they play Florida Sept. 12. Will the Bucs have memories of the Gators from Birmingham last January. Remember, when the boys from G-Vegas went down there in '83, they almost came home with a win.

But these are our state favorites, and they'll do plenty before the leaves leave the trees to keep us pumped, anticipating, nervous, worried, and excited.

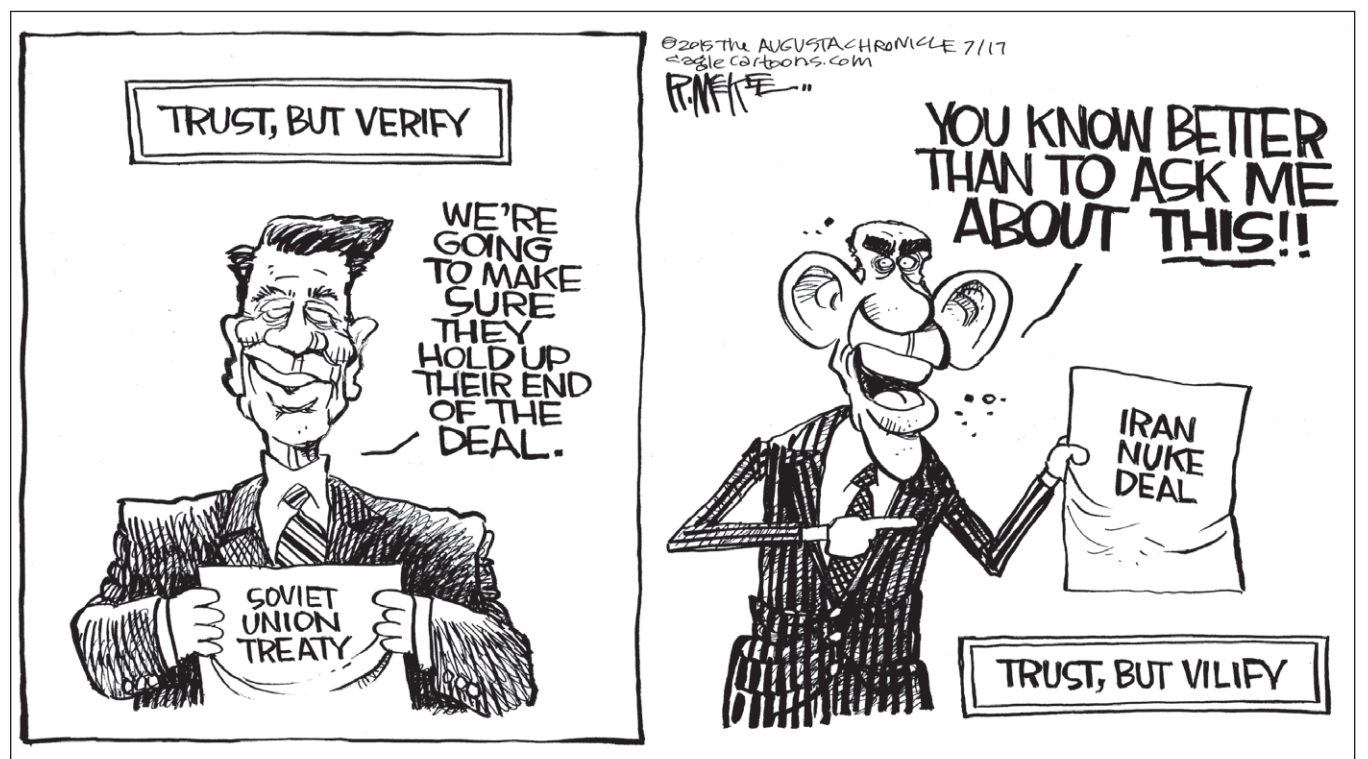
That's what you have to love about predicting winners at this time of year. I know people who had the Sooners winning it all last year at this time and Oklahoma ended up finishing 8-5 with a 40-6 loss to Clemson in the Citrus Bowl.

As for me, I was rolling with the Crimson Tide. Instead, I ended up Deacon Blues; that last reference being for you Steely Dan fans from back in the day.

So this year I pick.....

Uhm, could you just give me until the first of August, okay!?!?

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Panicky governmental over-reactions

Should regulators require child-safety locks on stepladders?

Such a rule would have been a real problem at the Hood abode years ago when my boys were little. At the time, there were a couple of different folding ladders that got transported from room to room throughout the day, allowing the Little Rascals access to videotapes (remember those?), action figures, model cannons, Pop Tarts, and other essentials of modern life.

But according to a recent report, more people in North Carolina die from falls in their homes than they do from such hazards as fires, drownings, or the discharge of firearms. The risk isn't limited to the elderly, so don't jump to conclusions: falls are also one of the leading causes of injuries to children under the age of 14.

So why not require some kind of lock or other device to keep young children and the infirm from mounting a stepladder? Because that would be impractical and silly, you might say. Because such a rule might even put more people in danger, since those deterred from using a ladder to reach a great height would probably use whatever else they could find to accomplish the task — some precarious tower of boxes or chairs that might make a fall more likely. You might also point out that while falls may represent one of the single-greatest safety hazards one might encounter in a home, the chance of being seriously injured or killed by a fall is still remote.

All of these arguments are valid. They also apply to other panicky gov-



JOHN HOOD

ernmental over-reactions. For example, years ago Congress required pills to be placed in bottles with childproof caps. You can understand why. Every year, some children were sickened or even killed by ingesting multiple pills they found in their parents' medicine cabinet. Unfortunately, as economist Kip Viscusi later established with carefully empirical study, the first round of childproof caps actually coincided with increases in overall poisonings. One explanation was that older people who took a lot of medicine found it difficult to work the caps and got in the habit of just leaving the caps off entirely. Another reason was a "lulling effect" on parents who took fewer precautions to keep their children out of medicine cabinets.

Think that mandating safety devices on automobiles represents an unalloyed improvement in traffic safety? Think again. There is a well-established phenomenon in these cases — called risk compensation or homeostasis by experts — in which drivers, knowing that they are surrounded by more protection or equipped with more safety devices, tend to drive a bit more recklessly. This can offset, partially or fully, the safety benefits of the regulation.

I trust I don't need to spend a lot of time explaining why gun control might make at least some people less safe. By now, the arguments surely sound familiar: North Carolina is a concealed-carry state. Crime and homicide rates are lower today than they were when the statute was enacted. Perhaps they would have fallen even more if North Carolinians weren't carrying concealed weapons, but it is certainly plausible — and there is, once again, empirical evidence pointing in this direction — that the policy deters some crimes by communicating to potential criminals that their victims could be armed and ready to respond with deadly force.

By the way, those who try to tally up the risks and rewards of gun availability by counting the number of times guns are fired in self-defense vs. in accidental injuries or deaths are engaging in statistical silliness. Guns are the most effective in enhancing our safety when they are not being fired. So to examine only cases in which guns are discharged is to seek an answer to the wrong question.

Freeing our lives from risk is impossible. Our goals should be to identify, manage, and minimize risk. The next time you hear someone mourn a tragic loss of life and pontificate about how "there ought to be a law," express sympathy but then diplomatically ask him what his position is on stepladder regulation.

John Hood is chairman of the John Locke Foundation. Follow him @JohnHoodNC.