



# **Impediments to Renewable Energy**

## Clean Energy Survey Reveals Heartfelt Beliefs

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This brief report contains a summary of the results of a survey 2GreenEnergy.com performed in late May, 2011, in which over 500 respondents provided their feedback on the migration to renewable energy. The project was quite focused in scope; in particular, it addressed one central issue:

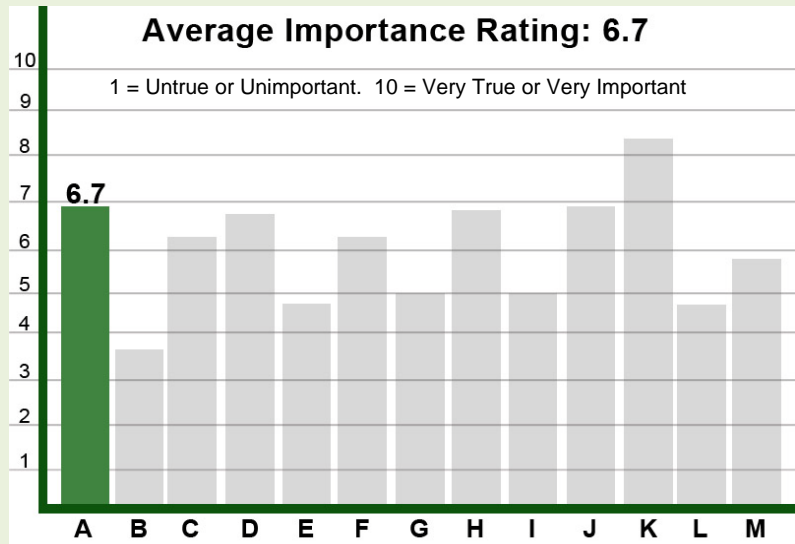
*The world is moving to clean energy, but at a far slower rate than many people would like to see. But why, exactly, is it so slow?*

Participants were provided the opportunity to rate the importance of a number of different possible reasons on a scale from 1 – 10. Then, at the end, they are asked the question in an “open-ended” fashion: “Having considered all these factors — as well as other ideas we may have missed — how would you, in your own words, articulate the actual, most pressing reason that we are so slow to move to clean energy?”

The results are summarized in the bar chart on the following pages.

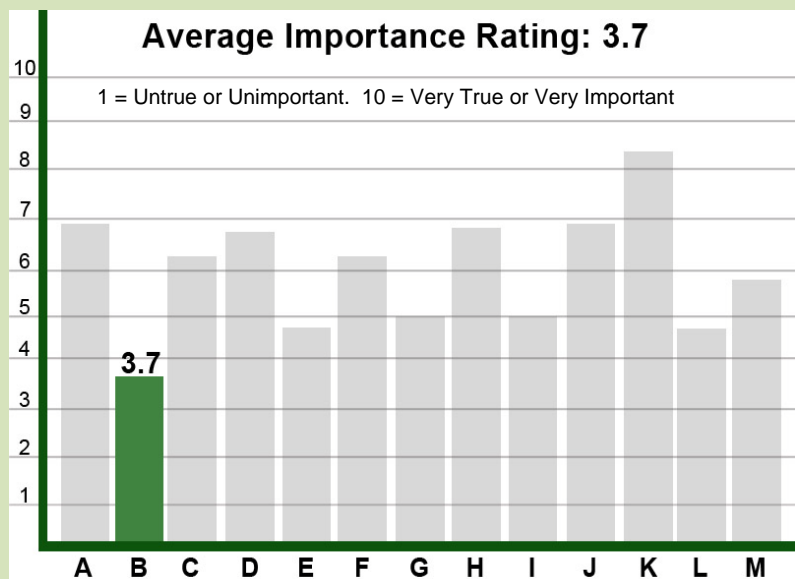
# A

Our elected leaders' jobs come up for renewal every two years. The migration to clean energy, by contrast, is a long-term endeavor. It is unrealistic to expect that our representatives in Washington will take a stand whose benefits are not clear to voters in the current election cycle.



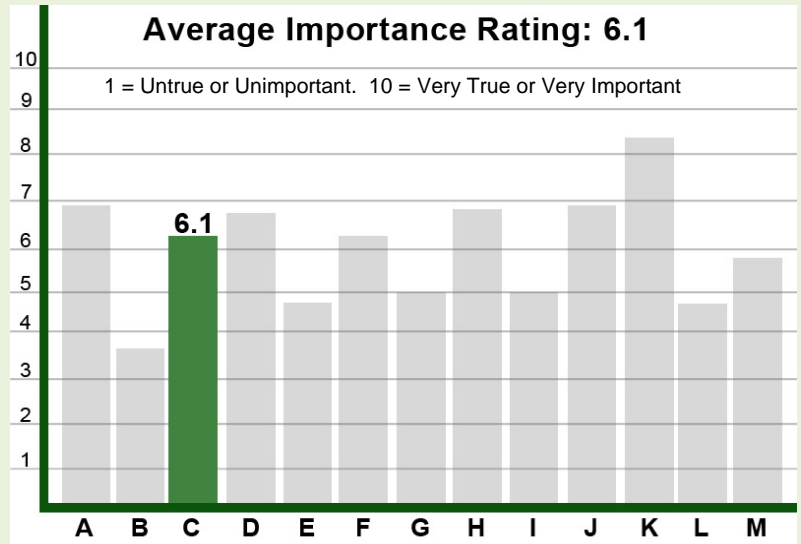
# B

Renewable energy solutions come at a cost to the environment, just like fossil fuels. E.g., wind turbines kill bats, solar thermal endangers the desert tortoise, etc.



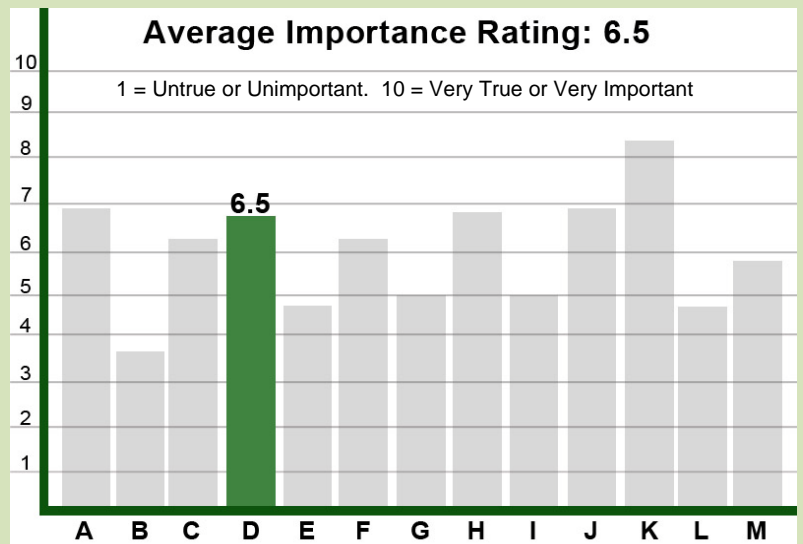
**C**

**Most of the applications of renewable energy come at an unacceptable cost to the consumer. Electric vehicles, for instance, cost more and look weird, while forcing the customer to deal with range anxiety, face certain levels of inconvenience, and charge their cars at night. People fear and resist change, and refuse to make sacrifices.**



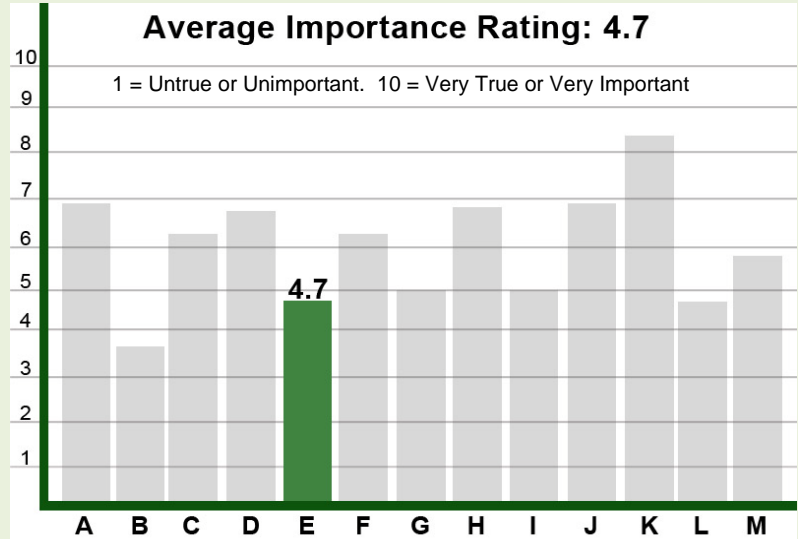
**D**

**Smart-grid technology is really the gating factor to implementing renewables. Our grid in its current condition does not enable us to transmit power intelligently or efficiently, and most clean energy resources are regional, and located far from population centers where the majority of the load exists.**



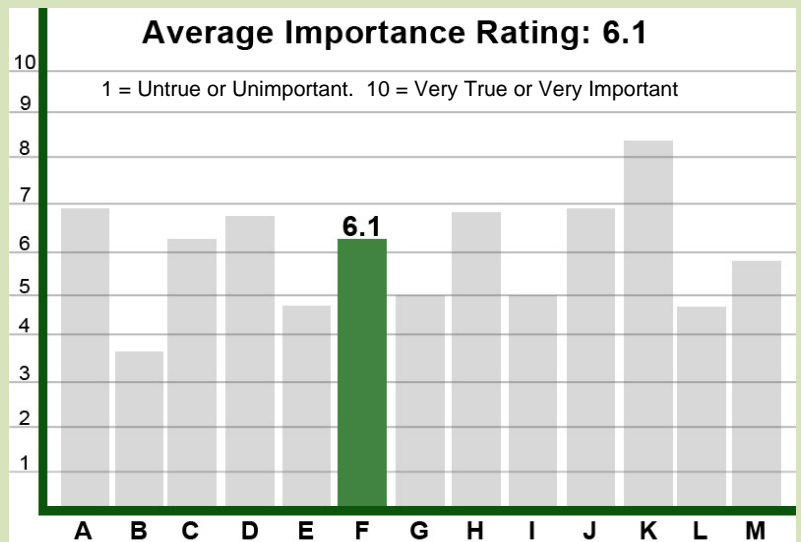
# E

**The discovery of huge gas fields and the development of new technology for oil exploration will make the cost of fossil fuels comparatively low for the foreseeable future.**



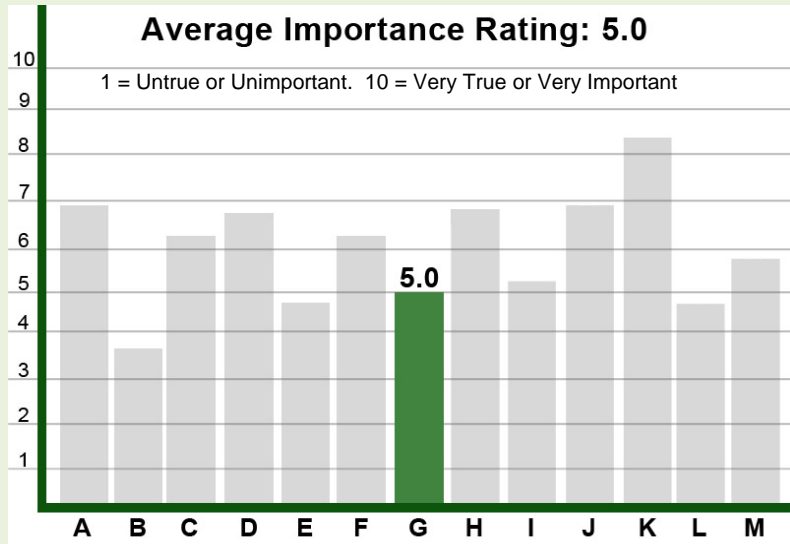
# F

**Oil companies have effectively repositioned themselves in our minds as “energy companies,” vigorously investing in renewables. Enough people believe this that there is little pressure remaining on the oil companies to take real and substantive actions in the direction of clean energy.**



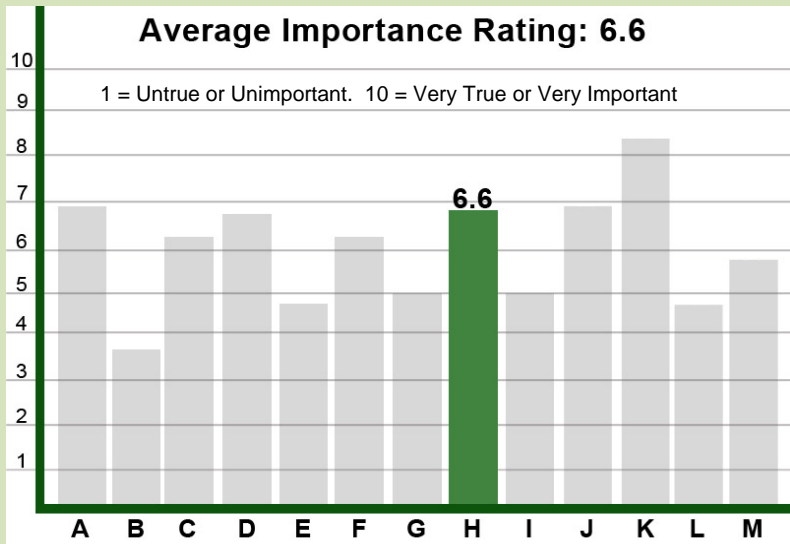
**G**

**The “military industrial complex” is so large and pervasive in our world that we will always find an excuse to fight wars. The exercise of our military strength guarantees continued access to abundant oil.**



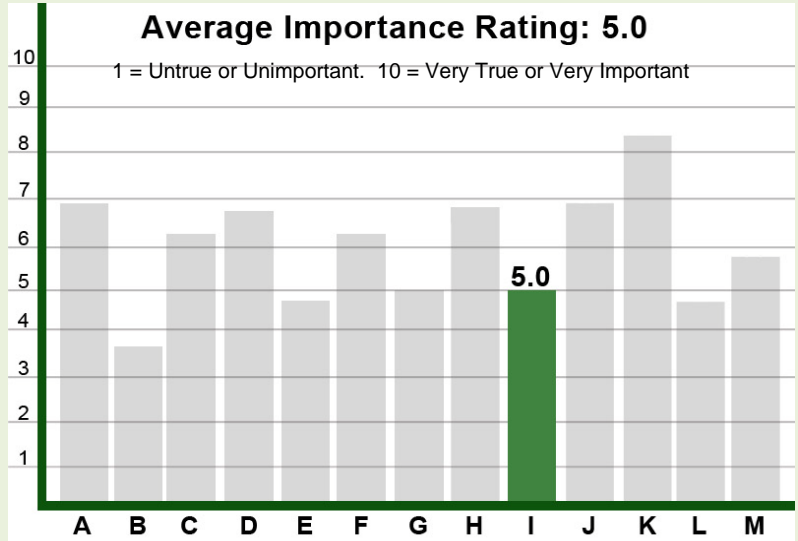
**H**

**The public generally believes that the imperative to move away from fossil fuels and nuclear is over-hyped. Many people accept what they read, e.g., global warming is unproven (perhaps even a hoax), we have plenty of oil, nuclear is (or can be made) safe, etc.**



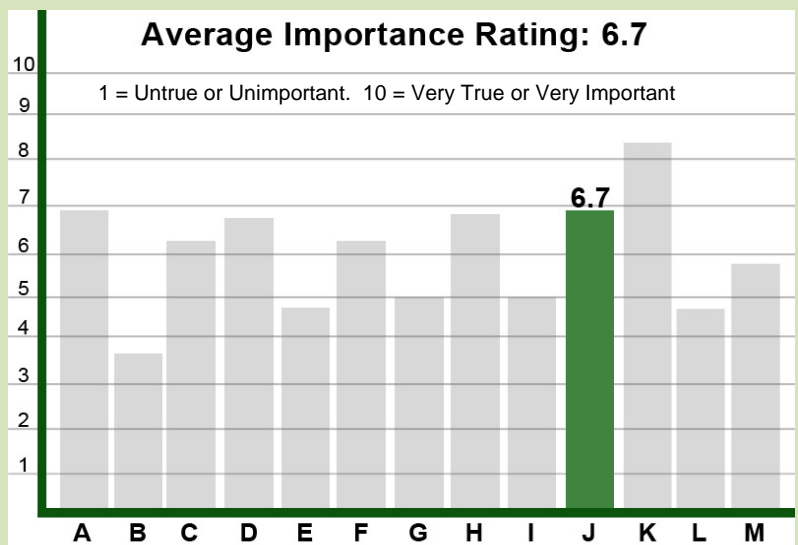
**I**

**Renewables provide only intermittent power; there are no cost-effective energy storage solutions that would enable them to contribute meaningfully to baseload.**



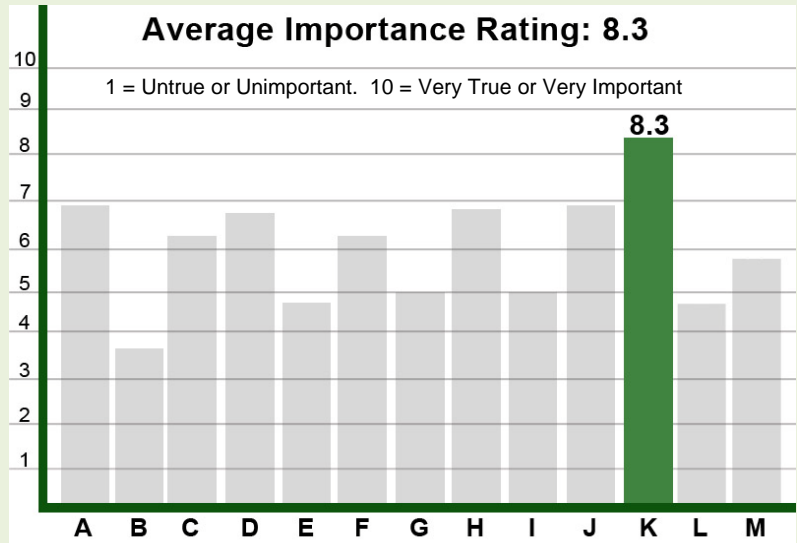
**J**

**Investors are sitting on more than a trillion dollars in private capital. They're nervous generally, and understandably even more so about entering an industry that is new and unproven.**



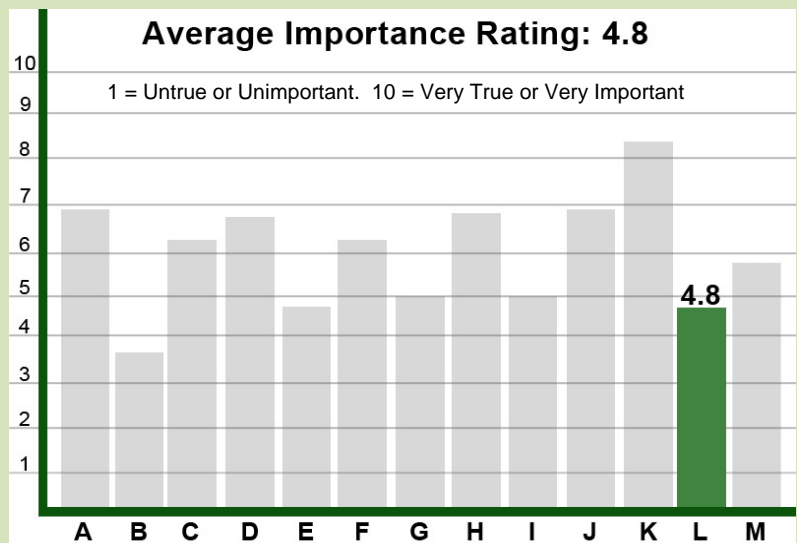
# K

**Big oil (and coal, nuclear, etc.) have extremely powerful lobbies that have created an unlevel playing field, favoring their monopolistic positions over renewables. Proof of this is the huge subsidies that taxpayers send, further enriching these fantastically profitable companies.**



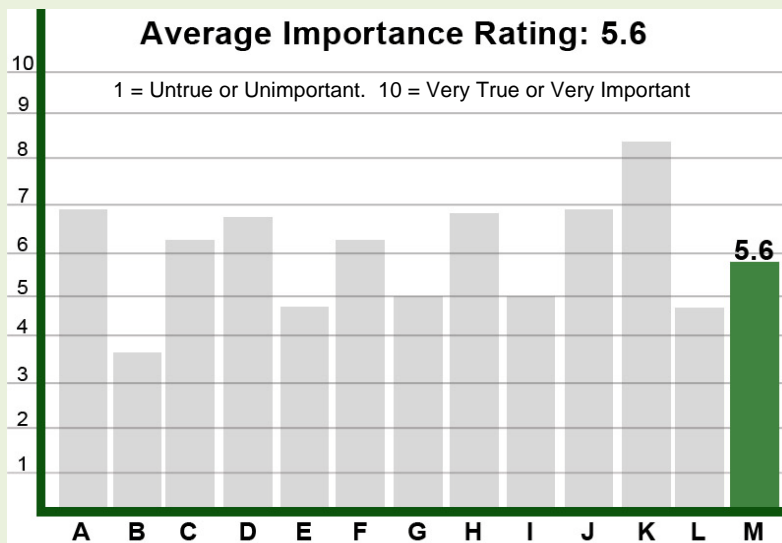
# L

**The market, rather than the government, should decide what technologies to embrace. It's not up to state bureaucracies to make policies that distort free market conditions. If renewables are slow to grab hold, that's because the market has spoken.**



**M**

**Even the mature forms of clean energy (wind and solar photovoltaics) are too expensive. Renewables cannot compete with coal on a cost basis, and people have no appetite for higher energy bills - especially not now, considering the recession and high unemployment.**










## Analysis


At a glance, we see respondents' beliefs that the political and economic power wielded by "Big Energy" has a chilling effect on competitive solutions. Perhaps even more telling are the comments provided to the last question, the common thread of which is:


*The established energy industry uses its enormous power to maintain its monopolistic positions. This is facilitated by the media serving up distortions and oversimplifications to a public that hungrily devours it, as Americans are not interested in digging for the truth, nor in making compromises in their lifestyles regardless. As a result, the electorate puts very little pressure on its elected leaders, so lawmakers and big energy lobbyists work hand-in-hand to perpetuate the status quo.*

Indeed, the numerical results indicate clearly participants' beliefs that the true culprit is the lobbying efforts that have been orchestrated by the traditional energy industries. And if any doubt remained about this finding, it was removed by examining the rich and often impassioned comments, a few examples of which appear below.


-  "Fear and inertia are pandered to by an elite whose values have been shaped by a highly competitive and money-focused route to the top. Besides the media constantly makes it easier to conform to the comfortable half-truths of populist politics. Self-interest of a hidden elite prevents a true ethical transformation."
-  "The big reason we are becoming a backward country while the rest of the world is advancing is that we live in a plutocracy (run by the rich who buy the ads and politicians), and the public doesn't know or care because those with the money are 'buying' the truth."
-  "Where can we get leaders who commit to a long vision to the future? Government policy is critical to rapidly implement the necessary changes, as Germany has demonstrated."
-  "The big, dirty industry funded climate change denial machine is very powerful."
-  "The problem is, in a word, 'misinformation.'"
-  "We are coming to election time and the full-page ads have begun to appear, denouncing renewables as too expensive and unreliable, and blaming them for 'requiring expensive smart meters and new infrastructure', ignoring the fact that our grid structure has been neglected too long and must be upgraded anyway, renewables or not."


 “Green energy will never reach its fruition until enough money is put on the lobbying table to compete with big oil. Sad but true.”


 “Very complex situation. Good government policy has been lacking forever, the energy industry resists the transition at every turn having profits ahead of doing the right thing, regulators have no clue, and people sit there and say nothing.”


 “There is a growing desire on the part of humanity for cleaner energy, coinciding with a growing demand for energy overall. Those in wealthy and powerful places tend to have a vested interest in the status quo, i.e., fossil fuel energy, and create confusion by the spread of half-truths and lies to protect their own interests (their grandchildren be damned). The American political cycle cannot tolerate long-term, strategic thinking under the pressure of hundreds of well-paid and expert lobbyists.”


Again, this is all exacerbated by the fact the public is lazy and selfish – a few citing biological reasons:

 “There are many links in this anchor chain, only one need be broken for the chain to fail. I think a free media is key. I’m frankly shocked at the crap people wish to believe. A nation of sheep.”


 “There may be a consensus in the scientific community but the public likes seeing dissent and are eager to clutch at the skeptics’ straws – they don’t want to have to make all these difficult lifestyle changes.”

 “People in this country do not understand how inefficiently we use energy. We trail only Australia in our per capita energy use.”


 “Most pressing issue: amygdala, aka, old brain issues. We in the US do not feel energy deprived and have very few memories or even the capability to imagine what that climate change would look/feel like. Creating a palpable loss aversion frame would speed behavioral change but — there in lies a challenge — speed also creates panic and unstable situations.”

 “It’s the amygdala, the source of our conservatism and resistance to change.”

In addition, a great number of respondents point out that the bureaucracy and regulatory hurdles in the US impose a huge burden:


-  “Just as a comparison, I have been fighting for 2 years now to get a PV system installed in Hoboken, NJ. In between while waiting for all kinds of silly approvals, I built 2 systems in Germany and 1 in Italy. Total time for those 3 systems (planning, material sourcing, and installation) took less than 2 months.”

A few mention that renewable energy is simply more expensive than that generated by coal, and thus there is truly no mystery that investors are staying on the sidelines.

-  “I believe immediate cost – the cost today of deploying renewable energy is about the biggest factor slowing the move to clean energy. Though it pays back over the long term, it is much more difficult to move to those systems when presently, there is a cheaper option which we are so much used to.”

### Conclusion

Respondents clearly agree that there are numerous impediments to our migration to renewables, and that these forces interact with one another in a variety of complicated ways. The vast majority of those interviewed expressed an understandable level of frustration associated with this, some quoting statistics to show the utter absurdity of the situation, as if to say “the thing speaks for itself,” for example:

-  “Germany is putting up more photovoltaics in one week than New Jersey has put up in three years. The tiny Czech Republic now has twice as much PV as the entire United States. In Michigan the electric utility refuses to install large scale solar because it is too cloudy there, while eight miles across the border in Ontario is the world’s largest PV plant.”

The main conclusion appears to be that there exists a significant number of people who feel that the de facto energy policy in the US is created by extremely large, powerful, but largely unseen forces that maintain our country’s devotion to fossil fuels and nuclear. This runs counter to the will of the people, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The US must not be content to become an after-thought in the global energy picture.

2. We need to create a level playing field, which could be accomplished by getting rid of artificially cheap energy.
3. We should “internalize the externalities,” i.e., force producers and consumers to pay the true costs of energy as they are incurred.
4. We need the jobs that will be associated with our country’s commitment to lead the world in clean energy.
5. Such leadership will require courage and independence on the part of our elected leaders, but to date, our democratic process has proven ineffective in providing that courage.

### About 2GreenEnergy.com



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<http://2greenenergy.com/2greenenergy-alert/>

Craig Shields, the site's editor, is the author of [Renewable Energy — Facts and Fantasies](#), published by Clean Energy Press, 2010.