Never before in the history of this great nation has there been any regulation of carbon dioxide released when coal is burned. Unlimited amounts of carbon dioxide pollution has been allowed to spew from coal power plants for as long as they have existed. Until now.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s June 2nd release of its draft Carbon Dioxide Pollution Standard rules are getting people excited. And here’s why: carbon dioxide is the #1 greenhouse gas contributing to global warming, and it’s really important that the US join the rest of the industrialized nations in regulating this pollutant.

Along the way, we can create thousands more jobs in Missouri alone, clean up our air and water, and become better stewards of God’s great earth by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible. I’m looking forward to us curbing greenhouse gas emissions by creating local jobs to deploy already-proven, cost-effective technologies like rooftop solar, utility-scale wind, and making our buildings more energy efficient.

It’s time to clean up our greenhouse gas emissions, and it’s time to get excited about all the benefits of doing so. I urge us as Missourians to listen to our hearts, see the benefits of lessening our 83% dependence on coal, and take responsibility for lessening our carbon emissions now. It’s not “too expensive” for us to enjoy the benefits of a clean environment. But it would certainly be too expensive for us not to do so.

PJ Wilson
Director, Renew Missouri
Mo. Supreme Court Ruled Empire Must Offer Solar Rebates
Submitted by Cheryl Y. Marcum

In a 5-2 decision released February 10 by the Missouri Supreme Court, Stockton’s electric utility, Empire District Electric Company, must offer solar rebates to its customers. Renew Missouri and Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE) won their appeal from the Public Service Commission against Empire District Electric Company. The ruling is final, and repeals a law that Empire claimed gave them an exemption from offering solar rebates to its customers. “This ruling legally clarifies that as of today, more than six years after a majority of Empire’s own customers voted to require them to do so, Empire must offer solar rebates,” said PJ Wilson, Director of Renew Missouri.

Missouri voters passed the Missouri renewable standard in 2008 with over 66 percent of the vote. The state-wide ballot initiative, Proposition C, requires Missouri’s three large investor-owned utilities (IOUs) to obtain 15 percent of their electricity sold from renewable energy resources from Missouri and neighboring states, such as solar panels and wind turbines, by 2021, with a 1 percent cap on consumer rate increases attributed to renewable energy sourcing. Proposition C included two solar provisions. It requires IOUs to obtain 2 percent of the 15% renewables sold from solar, called a “solar carve-out,” and the law also requires utilities to offer $2 per watt solar rebates for systems of 25 kW or less of installed capacity. That translates to a $6,000 rebate on a typical residential 3 kW solar system, covering 1/3 or more of the total installation cost. A federal tax credit pays for 30% of the renaming cost. Proposition C does not apply to municipal utilities or electric cooperatives.

According to The Earth Island Journal, the solar rebate grew the solar industry in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas served by the other two IOUs, Ameren Missouri and Kansas City Power & Light. “Three thousand jobs were created, over 125 megawatts of solar panels were installed on over 7,500 Missouri rooftops, and 45 solar companies were created,” state PJ Wilson, director of Renew Missouri.

The Supreme Court’s ruling relied largely on the fact that the state legislature tried to preempt Proposition C which was on the ballot in November 2008. In May 2008, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1181, which exempted Empire from any solar requirements should they be created in the future. But the court concluded that the so-called Empire exemption “was repealed by the passage of Proposition C,” since Proposition C passed after the legislature’s action and required all publicly regulated utilities, including Empire District Electric Company, to offer solar rebates to their customers starting January 2010. The court explained in their ruling “the legislature could not preemptively negate the effect of the initiative before it had even been voted on by the people and make the people’s later vote a meaningless act…”

Plaintiffs were represented by Henry Robertson with the nonprofit Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, based in St Louis. “This is a validation of the initiative petition process, and clarifies that the legislature can’t subvert the will of the people before they even get a chance to vote on an issue,” said Robertson about the decision. “Empire customers will now enjoy the same economic benefits of solar energy as seen elsewhere in Missouri.” said Heather Navarro, Executive Director of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment.

While Ameren Missouri and Kansas City Power & Light have supplied over $175 million in solar incentives in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas since 2010, Empire District Electric Company has yet to offer the rebates to their customers as required by law. That is about to change.

For more information about the ruling, visit http://www.courts.mo.gov/file.jsp?id=83613.
For more information about Missouri’s renewal energy standard, visit http://www.dsireusa.org/incentives/incentive.cfm?Incentive_Code=MO08R.
To apply for a solar rebate, contact Empire District Electric Company.

Renew Missouri is a Columbia, Missouri based nonprofit with a mission to transform Missouri into a leading state in energy efficiency and renewable energy by 2016.

Great Rivers is a nonprofit public interest environmental law firm in St. Louis that provides free and reduced-fee legal services to those working to protect the environment and public health, www.greatriverslaw.org.

The Missouri Coalition for the Environment, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) state-level conservation organization, is a force for clean air, clean water and clean energy in Missouri. Since 1969 it has educated and activated Missourians to protect the land we all love, www.moenviron.org.