

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Effecting Environmental and Social Change from the Bottom Up

2011



"Whether it's cell phone towers or retail outlets, the issue for many communities is asserting their power to decide their own futures . . . Towns need the legal tools and expertise it takes to protect their character. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance can help. Check out www.NewRules.org."

Boston Globe

"New Rules...is setting out to change the world. This nonpartisan group has a vision of the future based on rational regulation (the 'new rules') written with the interests of individual citizens rather than conglomerates and politicians at heart... Any city with an active electorate will value the research and guidance provided on these important issues..."

Library Journal

Organization

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) is a national research and policy organization founded in 1974 to advance community-centered, environmentally sound and equitable economic development.

To this end, we work with citizens, activists, policymakers, and entrepreneurs to design systems, policies, and industries that meet local or regional needs; to maximize local human, material, natural, and financial resources; and to ensure that the benefits of these systems and resources accrue to all.

For 37 years, the Institute has pioneered in several areas, including the “new localism,” urban materials recovery (recycling and reuse), decentralized energy sources, locally owned businesses and publicly owned telecommunications infrastructure.

ILSR currently has a staff of 13 at its three offices in Washington, D.C. and Minneapolis and a total organizational budget of \$1.2 million.

Approach

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) has worked to promote an equitable, sustainable, democratic and prosperous future from the bottom up. We call this vision local self-reliance.

For ILSR, local self-reliance does not mean self-sufficiency. Even nations are not self-sufficient. But they are self-conscious and self-governing and capable of tracking and influencing the flow of resources through their borders.

Local self-reliance is achieved by addressing problems holistically and maximizing the value from local resources – human, natural and financial.

Throughout history, innovation has bubbled up from below: democracy itself; cooperatives; minimum wage and maximum hour laws; universal health insurance; building safety standards; automobile efficiency standards; renewable energy mandates. All were initiated not from the

federal level but from the state or local level.

ILSR largely, although not exclusively, targets urban areas. That is where 80 percent of Americans (and half the world's population) live and work, and where significant political and financial authority resides.

Local governments are on the front lines in dealing with social problems and in nurturing innovation.

The federal government can appropriate highway funds, but local governments must deal with potholes, a problem whose collective cost to Americans in car repairs may be greater than the savings from new highways in reduced travel times. The federal government can provide incentives for renewable energy, but states and cities will write the rules that enable or disable the introduction of renewable energy on a wide scale. In a period of severe economic contraction, cities and neighborhoods are on the front lines in dealing with increased domestic violence and overloaded public hospital emergency rooms and the unrest that comes from increased unemployment.

Strategy

For more than three decades ILSR has worked in the trenches, working with sanitation workers, engineers, bond counselors, small business owners, neighborhood organizations, city planning departments, city councilors, activists and others to develop strategies and projects that enable and manifest local self-reliance. In the process we have learned what works and what doesn't.

Our technical assistance often is requested by communities fighting against something—a huge new big box store, a garbage incinerator, a high voltage transmission line, an unresponsive cable or telephone company. We work with them to overcome the negative but at the same time we stress the positive.

We provide the assistance needed to defer garbage incinerators and then work in an ongoing fashion with communities to maximize recycling, reuse and zero waste strategies as a new foundation for economic development. We assist communities in fighting against Wal-Mart superstores while building an alliance of locally owned businesses and environmentalists and others that later focuses on ways to nurture the local economy. We work with communities fighting extra high voltage transmission lines while at the same time helping them to maximize a decentralized energy approach. We respond to communities dissatisfied by the glacial pace at which current telecommunication service providers are building a high-speed information network by providing them the justification, information, and expertise needed to move toward a publicly owned telecommunications network with universal access.

ILSR uses three strategies to achieve our objectives.

1) Public education

We present the concept in many popular forums, through books and reports, through articles and interviews in journals and newspapers, in appearances on radio and TV, via presentations to many different types of audiences and through social networks and blogs. We publish well-documented and accessible policy briefs and longer reports. We use many forms of media: print, webinars, videos, and graphics.

2) A library of rules and tools

One of the key lessons we have learned is that the possibilities for local self-reliance are undercut by the reality of rules—regulations, tax incentives, codes, standards, laws—that channel investment capital, scientific genius, and entrepreneurial energy toward the construction of centralized and absentee owned institutions and production technologies. Our New Rules Project was launched in the late 1990s to directly address and overcome this obstacle.

The New Rules web site identifies the best rules that promote local self-reliance and thwart concentration and posts the text of the actual rule on our web site. More than 95 percent of the 400 rules posted to date have been enacted in at least one jurisdiction. That is helpful in overcoming the reluctance of other communities.

The New Rules web site also offers ongoing news items about local self-reliance efforts here and abroad, as well as links to pertinent research documents and organizations.

3) Direct technical assistance

Since we have a small staff, we focus our direct technical assistance and strategic outreach on a few sectors. We choose sectors based on four criteria:

- a) Something is already happening. Thus ILSR does not have to try to get a community involved but rather to inform and guide its involvement.
- b) The work illuminates and furthers the local self-reliance paradigm.
- c) Success is possible in the short term.
- d) The skill set needed to provide useful assistance is available either in-house or within our networks.

Based on these criteria, we focus on the following areas: solid waste, energy, retail business, and telecommunications. The first two are sectors we have worked on since our founding. Retail was added in the late 1990s and telecommunications in 2005.

Current projects

Retail Businesses: The Hometown Advantage

We focus on the retail sector because retail is where business meets household, where commerce is most intimately linked to community.

Our retail work piggybacks on the struggles by small business and communities against the invasion of big box stores. We have helped communities stop Wal-Mart and its brethren from coming to town and in the process we often transform these defensive battles into broader, proactive campaigns to constrain corporate power, enhance community self-determination, and facilitate an economy that supports the common good. We establish partnerships with the business community and try to instill in them an awareness that locally owned and rooted businesses have a different self-interest that requires different policies than for large absentee owned corporations.

To develop this self-awareness, ILSR helped found the American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA), which in the last nine years has established independent business associations in more than four dozen cities.

In 2008, we developed the first regional network of independent business alliances (in New England) and convened a daylong meeting of 9 national trade associations representing independent businesses (such as booksellers, toy retailers, florists, office supply dealers, and pharmacists). This meeting resulted in the creation of the Independent Business Forum (IBF) to exchange information and undertake coordinated efforts. IBF first initiative was to conduct a survey, designed and administered by ILSR, of 1,200 independent retailers that revealed that those in cities with strong "buy local" campaigns are faring better than those in cities without such campaigns. The survey is now done on an annual basis. In 2011 the number of retailers involved has risen to 2800. The results are widely reported in local and national journals.

Another initiative was to mobilize its New York members to support a bill to require Internet retailers, such as Amazon.com, to collect sales tax as physical stores must do. The support of the small business community offset the opposition by major business organizations in the state. The bill passed.

In 2010 Stacy Mitchell, Director of the HomeTown Advantage program, working with the American Independent Booksellers Association, established a new organization consisting at present of 30 small business trade associations and organizations. She delivered the keynote address on the "State of the Independents Movement" at its founding meeting in Washington DC. She now serves on AIR's steering committee and is planning coalition activities. One of those activities may be to launch a nationwide campaign called "Leveling the Playing Field". To that end, Stacy organized and moderated a conference call with state fiscal policy groups and independent business alliances to discuss closing state tax loopholes that benefit big corporations.

ILSR also works directly with independent business associations. One illustrative example occurred in late 2008 when a study commissioned by the Wal-Mart and Walgreen's-backed group, North Dakotans for Affordable Healthcare, that argued for a repeal of the state's 60-

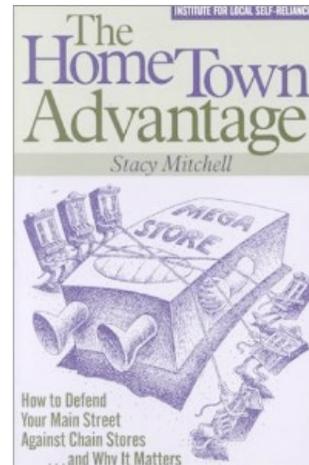
"Your work is a great national resource for all of us."

– David Nimkin, Chair

Utah Microenterprise Loan Fund and Utah Local First

year-old law that effectively prohibited big box pharmacies. ILSR wrote a policy brief, *The Benefits of North Dakota's Pharmacy Ownership Law*, in response to the Wal-Mart report. The North Dakota Pharmacy Association (NDPA) presented the study at a meeting with the North Dakota governor and circulated it to all state legislators.

Subsequently, the policy brief was cited in newspapers, on radio shows, and by legislators in support of defending the Pharmacy Ownership Law. In early 2009 ILSR staff was invited by NDPA to testify before the legislature. Much of the hearing was spent debating the merits of our report. Ultimately, our position prevailed when the House voted to keep the Pharmacy Ownership Law by defeating the bill to repeal the law by a wide margin (35-57).



Stacy was a lead testifier in a hearing on Wal-Mart's impact on small business held by the New York City council. Her testimony has been widely cited in blogs. She also submitted written testimony and a written analysis of Wal-Mart economic impact studies in other cities, including Chicago and Baltimore.

In the summer of 2009, ILSR began focusing on global corporation's use of the word "local" in their advertising. Working with the nation's alternative weeklies, ILSR launch an initiative. Stacy Mitchell's long article, "The Corporate Co-Opt of 'Local'" was run in over 15 weeklies with a circulation of over 1.5 million, as well as in many other on-line and print journals. Most of the weeklies added local content to the story.

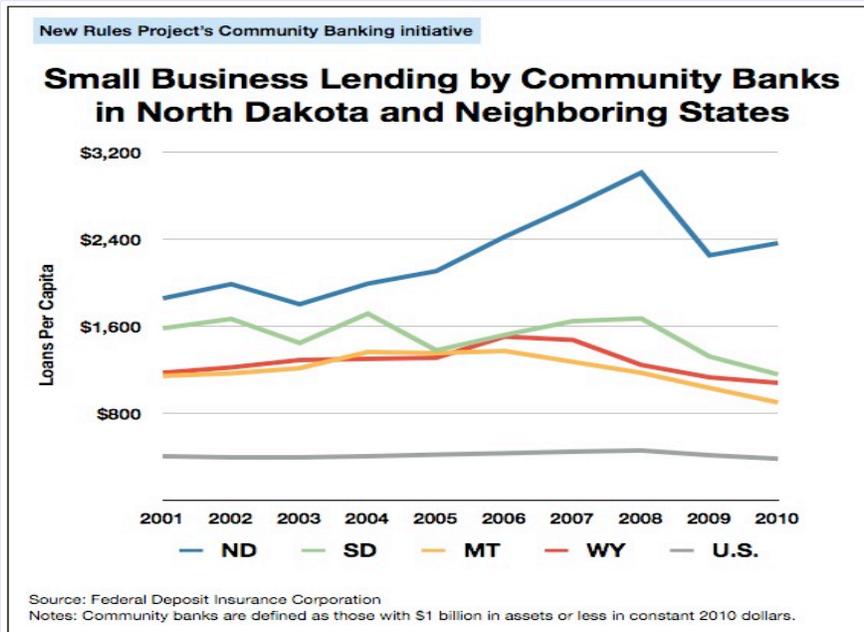
In the last year Stacy's work has been cited in roughly 60 news stories, including two in the *New York Times*, and in over 500 blogs. In August 2010, *Business Week* published Stacy's commentary, "Misrepresenting Small Business" which criticized the U.S. Chamber and the National Federation of Independent Businesses for not representing the interests of small businesses.

In April 2011 Stacy took a leaf from the Harper's Index and published *The Localism Index*, a compilation of positive statistics about the comeback of the local. The Index was widely disseminated and published in *The Nation*.

Stacy has delivered many speeches over the past year to local government and independent business associations. These included a speech in Salt Lake City sponsored by Utah Local First and the Utah League of Cities, a presentation via webinar to the International Municipal Lawyers Association, a presentation on a panel (alongside Gloria Steinem!) following a film screening in NYC and presentations to meetings of several trade associations, including one at the Independent Garden Center trade show and another to TriMega (a large office supply co-op).

A little over a year ago we launched the **Community Banking Initiative** as a part of our advocacy work for independent businesses. Since then we have established the New Rules Project as an important voice on this issue and made connections to key organizations. Our banking work was written up in piece by Katrina vanden Heuvel on *The Nation's* website.

Chart of Small Business Lending from the Community Banking Initiative



We developed a **Tool Kit for Launching a Local Move Your Money** campaign that has been utilized by a number of grassroots groups and independent business alliances.

Stacy has had a dozen front-page articles in the *Huffington Post* that examined the economic, consumer and community advantages of local financial institutions as well as policies that discourage and encourage community banks. Many of these pieces have been picked up or referenced in other media. For example, our piece on the preemption debate was cited in *The Hill*. *Baseline Scenario* picked up the piece on consumer fees at large vs. small banks. The article on the role of small banks in small business lending has been widely cited on the web and received nearly 8,000 views on the New Rules web site.

We have also produced an extensive collection of graphs widely used by groups around the country advocating for state banks on the North Dakota bank model.

Waste-Based Economic Development

Larger cities generate more paper than a good-sized timber stand, and more metals than a modest sized copper or bauxite mine. We work with activists, policymakers and businesses to reduce waste generation and maximize the recovery and remanufacturing or reuse of these materials and their associated products. ILSR published the first case-study report on the potential for high level recycling in 1989, *Beyond 25*

Percent: Materials Recovery Comes of Age. This work was subsequently updated in 1991, 1994, and 1999.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, ILSR was a national leader in the fight against waste incinerators, falsely promoted by the industry as "waste to energy" plants. By the end of the 1980s, as a result of grassroots activism, the vast majority of the 300 proposed plants had been defeated or withdrawn.



Recently, garbage incinerators have been given a new lease on life as states have begun designating them as renewable energy resources like solar and wind. Thus once again local activists and officials are tapping into our expertise and experience in this area. In the last three years, ILSR has helped stop proposed incinerators in five states.

To counteract the legislative movement to label incinerators as renewable energy ILSR issued a detailed report, *Stop Trashing the Climate*. One of its key conclusions is that significantly reducing waste deposited in landfills and incinerators could reduce greenhouse gases by the equivalent of closing one-fifth of U.S. coal-fired power plants.

While helping to stop incinerators, ILSR's main work is to maximize the value urban areas extract from their existing materials stream. To this end we work with cities to design waste management systems that maximize recycling and to work with businesses to maximize the value added process of these recovered materials. We have done this in more than 30 cities. In the past year we've worked in San Juan, Los Angeles, Alachua County, FL, Peoria, Reading, Pennsylvania, Atlanta, Lake County, IL and many other urban areas.

In the late 1990s, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched a program to demolish and replace more than a million units of public housing, ILSR met with HUD officials to explain how deconstruction could be superior to demolition and become the basis for a rigorous job-training program for inner city youth because deconstruction, unlike demolition, requires a wide variety of skills. We developed a pilot project with the Hartford Housing Authority, a local construction and demolition firm and the Laborers International union to train residents from public housing projects. The success of that project led HUD to issue new guidelines that specifically requested local housing authorities to include deconstruction in their applications. ILSR later completed large-scale deconstruction projects in Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia. In the last year ILSR has provided technical assistance on deconstruction to Cleveland, Baltimore, Buffalo, Detroit, Syracuse and Dubuque.

More recently, ILSR is connecting composting to waste-based economic development. We are actively promoting composting as a key strategy to create jobs, diversify the agricultural sector, reduce organic wastes and the cost of handling these wastes, and to cut methane emissions from landfills. Today we are providing technical assistance to several cities, including the District of

Columbia through our Composting Makes Sen\$e initiative.

In Washington, DC. For example, ILSR, along with the Washington Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) co-chairs the Organics Task Force whose goal is to advance a regional strategy for expanding composting. As part of our work co-chairing the Organics Task Force, ILSR also met with numerous federal agencies to catalyze support for composting and to help determine what federal land is available for composting sites. ILSR has conducted regular “Composting 101” presentations for agencies including the National Park Service, the DC Department of the Environment, and the Washington Convention Center.

As part of our focus on recycling we established the Sustainable Plastics initiative in 2008. We co-chair and coordinate the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative and focus on policies that promote the use of biodegradable plastics while also promoting the manufacture of such plastics in a way that enables recycling. A major accomplishment for the SBC was the significant growth in the Working Landscape



The Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative (SBC) advances the introduction and use of biobased products that are sustainable throughout their lifecycle. We advance their development and use by creating strong sustainability guidelines, encouraging markets, and promoting policy initiatives. We define sustainable biomaterials as those that:

1. are sourced from sustainably grown and harvested cropland or forests,
2. are manufactured without hazardous inputs and impacts,
3. are healthy and safe for the environment during use,
4. are designed to be reutilized at the end of their intended use, such as via recycling or composting, and
5. provide living wages and do not exploit workers or communities throughout the product lifecycle.

Search

Search

Certificate (WLC) program, an offset program linking sustainable corn production practices to purchase of PLA corn-based plastic. In July, the SBC held a webinar, “Starting at the Source: Sustainability of Bioplastic Feedstocks,” on the importance of and tools for sustainable sourcing of biomass feedstocks. More than 150 people participated including businesses, universities, and federal and state government. In October, Stonyfield Farm, the world’s leading organic yogurt company, announced the introduction of corn-based plastic for its multipack yogurt containers in conjunction with its purchase of WLCs.

In association with technical experts and via a process that included substantial public comment we developed, “Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Specifications for Compostable Biobased Food Service Ware” (“BioSpecs”). We partnered with the Sustainable Research Group to develop a transparent process by which manufacturers would have their products assessed for conformance to the BioSpecs criteria.

In order to move the BioSpecs into the purchasing world, we have partnered with the Green Purchasing Institute (GPI). GPI has prepared sample bid documents that can be used by institutional purchasers. One of the most important BioSpecs feedback received is that purchasers need verifiable product criteria and a list of vetted products that meet these criteria. GPI will be enlisting institutional buyers to participate in creating a model program for case study development. In May, the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative joined with the Responsible Purchasing Network to host a webinar on purchasing compostable food service ware.

We continued to identify composting facilities that accept compostable plastics to document their operations, lessons learned, and challenges.

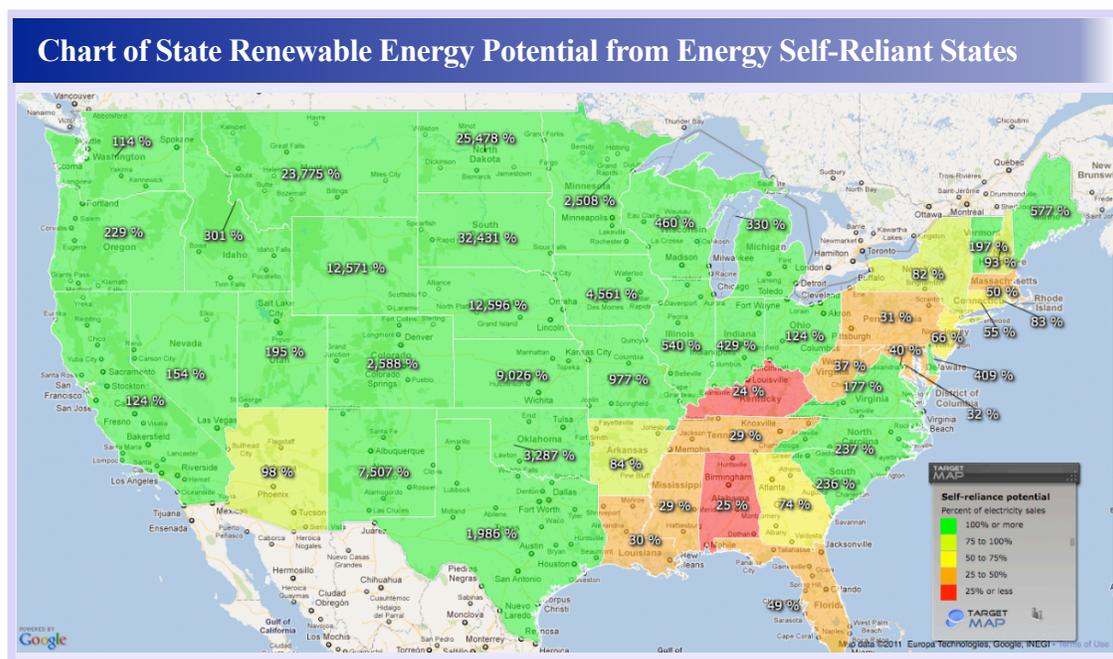
Our work highlighting the problems with recycling corn-based PLA bottles has led Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola to avoid their use. Instead, both corporations have developed and introduced a new generation of PET biobased bottles. PET is plastic resin #1, which is the resin with the highest recycling level. Coca Cola’s “PlantBottle” is partially derived from sugarcane-based ethanol. Pepsi’s bottle is made from switch grass, pine bark, corn husks and other materials.

Energy Self-Reliant States and Communities

Sunlight, wind, geothermal energy and plant matter represent readily available local resources that have become increasingly cost-competitive with conventional resources.

For our first 30 years, ILSR worked to get renewable energy out of tinkerers' garages and into the marketplace. In 1978, on contract with the Department of Energy, we conducted the first public hearings on solar energy. In 1982 our book, *Be Your Own Power Company* (Rodale Press) was the manual for on-site renewable power generators' negotiations with utilities under the new federal law requiring utilities to purchase their electricity. In the early 1980s, our work in St. Paul, MN, resulted in that city building the nation's largest hot water district heating system. The system now heats and cools 80 percent of downtown St. Paul's commercial buildings and is 85 percent fueled by tree clippings and wood wastes. In 1994, we worked with a coalition to convince the Minnesota legislature to enact the nation's first significant renewable energy mandate.

Today renewable energy industries are large and growing rapidly. Therefore we focus less on expanding the use of renewable energy than on the structure of a renewable energy future, on issues of scale and ownership and policies that promote an energy future that distributes economic benefits to many.



Our policy briefs provide a data-rich examination of the diseconomies of scale of large wind and solar electric facilities and the significantly increased benefits to local and regional economies from local ownership. One report, *Energy Self-Reliant States*, issued in October 2009, is an atlas presenting data showing that every state with a renewable energy standard could meet that standard by relying only on in-state renewable resources and over 60 percent of all states could be self-sufficient. The document has become an important source of information for those fighting high voltage, long distance transmission lines. Another policy brief, *Meeting Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard Using the Existing Transmission System* reported on the results of several studies undertaken by Minnesota utilities after several years of lobbying by ILSR and other organizations. Those studies concluded that sufficient capacity existed for Minnesota to meet its 25 percent renewable energy standard without building any major new high voltage transmission lines.

We have also worked to convince states to adopt a Feed-in-Tariff as a state level policy that could overcome the federal barriers to local ownership. A feed-in-tariff is a set premium price utilities must pay to renewable energy producers. It has been enormously successful in Europe not only as a spur to renewable energy but also as a spur to locally owned renewable energy projects. In early 2009, ILSR convened a conference with national and international experts on feed in tariffs. The conference was a standing room only affair, with 115 attendees, including utility representatives and state legislators as well as environmental organizations and small businesses. We videotaped the daylong conference and made it available on our web site. Since then we have issued a series of policy briefs on FITs and worked with several state legislatures to enact FIT-enabling policies.

"I want to thank you and the New Rules Project. You have been an incredibly helpful fountain of information, data, model legislation and contacts... Community activists, businesses, and good government groups, as well as members of our City Council, Planning Commission and other committees, have all relied on the New Rules resources... In conversations around the country, I have sung your praises, and have found many people are fortunately already familiar with your work."

– David Keller, former Petaluma City Councilor, Board Member of Sonoma County Action

We have launched an initiative to persuade cities to use their bonding authority to provide long term, low-cost loans to households and businesses. We believe that a local public energy bank could eventually become the hub of a local self-reliance initiative. ILSR has created on its web site a storehouse of rules and progress reports of state and city financing initiatives, including an up-to-date map of all municipal and county financing programs. We have worked with a number of states and cities and utility companies to implement an energy financing program. In 2010 we released *Municipal Energy Financing: Designing State Policy* that reviewed pioneering energy financing efforts using this model.

Staff presented the report's findings in several venues: a webinar with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices; an address to the Southwest Renewable Energy Conference in Albuquerque; a presentation at the Smart Energy Dialogue in Berlin, Germany. The latter presentation was financed by the Heinrich Boll Foundation, which awarded John Farrell, director of our energy program, a Transatlantic Climate Fellowship to visit Berlin and Brussels to share and gain knowledge about energy policy.

We believe that decentralized power generation has the potential for widespread ownership of power plants. However, many homes and apartment buildings cannot effectively generate solar energy on-site. Community solar projects are larger – usually ground mounted solar arrays – that allow households lacking roof space for solar or those with fewer financial resources to own a piece of a renewable power plant.

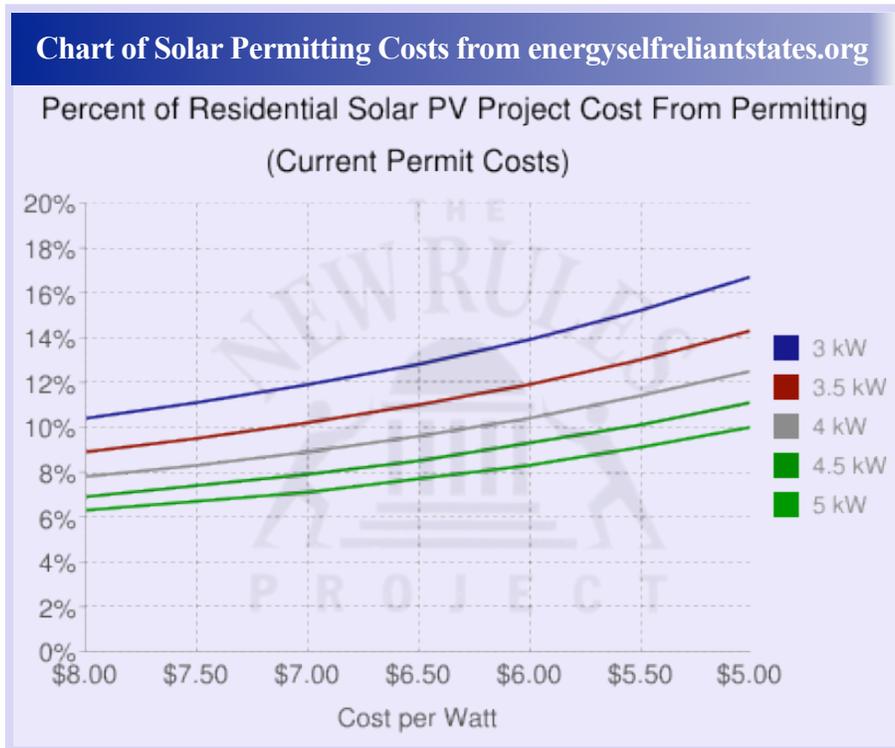
In 2010 we issued a report, *Community Solar Power: Obstacles and Opportunities* that highlighted community solar programs in the United States.

The report has helped many prospective community solar projects identify barriers in advance, and to structure their organization to overcome these barriers. John has been interviewed by a number of print as well as online publications, including *Home Power Magazine* and *Sierra* magazine.

Many states have enacted renewable energy mandates for its utilities but few have enacted policies that favor meeting those mandates with in-state production. We believe that to gain widespread support, renewable energy must bring economic benefits to those communities willing to mandate or subsidize its use. To that end we published, *Maximizing Jobs From Clean Energy: Ontario's 'Buy Local' Policy* that reported on Ontario Canada's unique requirement that to qualify for a long term premium priced contract, renewable energy power developers must source over 50 percent of their content from businesses within the province. The report generated a robust debate in the renewable energy community about whether states could or should pursue a similar policy in the U.S.

As part of our strategy to increase the energy productive capacity of communities and have them take responsibility for their greenhouse gas emissions, we have worked to break down the boundaries between the electricity and transportation sector. In 1993 ILSR issued the first in-depth report on a transportation future based on electrified vehicles with biofueled backup engines, *A Better Way to Get From Here to There*. In 2008 we issued an updated and expanded report, *Driving Our Way to Energy Independence*, that is a roadmap to an electrified transportation system. In October 2009, on request from a coalition of 110 environmental organizations in the Midwest, we completed a report that assessed current commercial and policy developments regarding electric vehicles and offered a strategic analysis.

The energy program received a huge boost from the appearance in October 2010 of energyselfreliantstates.org. The blog has rapidly gained a reputation for high quality analysis of renewable energy and distributed energy policy. It is also gaining a reputation for visualizing data, making it more accessible. The blog currently averages three weekly posts, most of them with charts. The posts are currently carried by *Renewable Energy World*, *Grist* and *Cleantechnica*.



The website has become a key resource for distributed energy advocates in many state, including California, Colorado, and Minnesota. Traffic is growing rapidly (1,500 visits per week in mid September).

John continues to advise cities as well as community groups on distributed generation strategies. In April 2011 he was invited to present to Boulder, Colorado's Clean Energy Action and Mayor and city council in order to inform their strategy to make Boulder a 100 percent renewable energy city.

Telecommunications As Commons

Ours is increasingly an information-based economy and communities and nations will be able to compete globally only if they have access to a high-speed communication network. The United States, once the leader in such networks, has fallen woefully behind other nations in recent years. ILSR argues that information networks should be viewed as an essential part of local infrastructure in the same way that road and highway networks have been. We argue for municipally owned networks as a way that guarantees that communities can make the rules that govern their information highways, which in turn can lead both to universal access and to a vibrant competition among information service providers.

Federal and state telecommunications policies have so restricted the authority of localities to shape their information future that for some the only recourse is to build their own network. Franchise contracts do not allow communities to regulate in the public interest and are a fatally flawed mechanism for promoting competition. A community network can use a different, more holistic, cost-benefit methodology than private networks do, one that tries to maximize the value to the community rather than only to investors. Such a network, for example, can break even and still be viewed as a success because of the value it creates within the community. A private network that merely breaks even would be deemed a financial failure.

ILSR has promoted the concept that competition in the telecommunication sector can be truly achieved only by public ownership. Under private ownership there will be at most two networks, both trying to maximize their net income and discriminating against third party service providers. A publicly owned network, on the other hand, can be open to all service providers.

In 2009, ILSR established a web site (www.muninetworks.org) to report on and monitor broadband developments with a specific focus on publicly owned information infrastructure. It has rapidly become the premiere source of news on these developments and a hub that connects technical experts, activists, academics, regulators, entrepreneurs and elected officials.

ILSR has quickly gained a national reputation as an organization that combines technical expertise in telecommunications networks with an ability to work with a broad range of groups. We've provided onsite technical assistance to activists in Portland, OR, and Seattle, WA, and long distance assistance to policy makers and local organizations in a dozen

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Community Broadband Networks' website. The header includes the title 'Community Broadband Networks' and the logo for the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR). Navigation links for Home, About Us, Key Points, Resources, Tags, and Donate are visible. There are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter, and a 'Subscribe via email for a weekly digest' button. The main content area features a news article titled 'Redwood County, Minnesota, Latest to Study FTTH' dated Tuesday, September 06, 2011. The article text discusses Minnesota's rural FTTH initiatives and Redwood County's economic development authority's decision to study fiber. A 'Random Quote' section on the right contains a quote about municipal broadband infrastructure. A map of Minnesota is partially visible at the bottom right of the article.

other cities. Our work helped cities like San Francisco and Philadelphia and Houston revisit the issue of public ownership.

We elaborate our arguments in a series of articles and reports. Sometimes these were in the form of longer overviews such as *Localizing the Internet: Five Ways Public Ownership Solves the U.S. Broadband Problem* and *Municipal Broadband: Demystifying Wireless and Fiber-Optic Options*. Sometimes they were brief articles or reports focused on specific communities such as, *Is a Publicly Owned Information Network a Wise Public Investment for San Francisco?* In 2011 we've produced three increasingly sophisticated videos to supplement and complement our written materials.

We carry our message of public ownership and open networks to national conferences of activists (e.g. International Summit for Community Wireless, National Conference for Media Reform) as well as national conferences of policy officials (e.g. National Association of Telecommunication Officers and Administrators). And we work with a number of national telecommunications activist organizations (e.g. Free Press, New America Foundation, Ethos) to coordinate efforts.

In mid 2010, Chris Mitchell, Director of the Telecommunications as Commons program released **Breaking the Broadband Monopoly** which remains the single most comprehensive report about publicly owned networks. Blair Levin, the architect of the FCC's National Broadband Plan has recommended this report to those who believe we should treat access to the Internet as basic infrastructure.

In the fall of 2010 we released two short reports containing empirical data proving community networks offer the fastest and least expensive broadband in the states of Minnesota and North Carolina.

In March 2011 we released the first comprehensive map of publicly owned broadband networks containing some 150 citywide fiber-optic and cable networks. The map received tremendous attention, garnering 10,000 views the first week. We are adding more networks to it, starting with publicly owned networks that offer telecom services on a partial basis (not across the entire community yet) as well as impressive publicly owned networks that serve only public buildings (e.g. DC-Net, Portland's IRNE).

In April 2011 we released *Publicly Owned Broadband Networks: Averting the Looming Broadband Monopoly*. The report highlights the growth of municipal networks and argues for community ownership as a key non-Washington-based strategy to overcome the national trend toward less competition and local accountability in broadband networks.

In early 2011 Burlington, Vermont's municipally owned network suffered serious financial and legal setbacks. Anti-public ownership groups seized on this misfortune to bolster their campaign against public ownership. In 2007 we had issued the first detailed report on Burlington Telecom that highlighted their progress. In August 2011 we released *Lessons From Burlington Telecom*, an extensive report on Burlington Telecom's current problems and the lessons other fledgling or proposed public networks can learn from Burlington's stumbles.

Over the past year we've provided technical assistance to over 30 communities. In over half we provided on-site assistance. For example, in Minnesota, officials in Sibley County, a southern rural county invited ILSR to present at several meetings to educate the citizenry on the issue. We also helped the County respond to false claims from incumbents who want to kill the project. Sibley is now engaged in a pre-subscription campaign to gauge the level of interest in the community network. If this initiative proves successful it be an important boost because few believe rural networks can be built without massive federal funding.

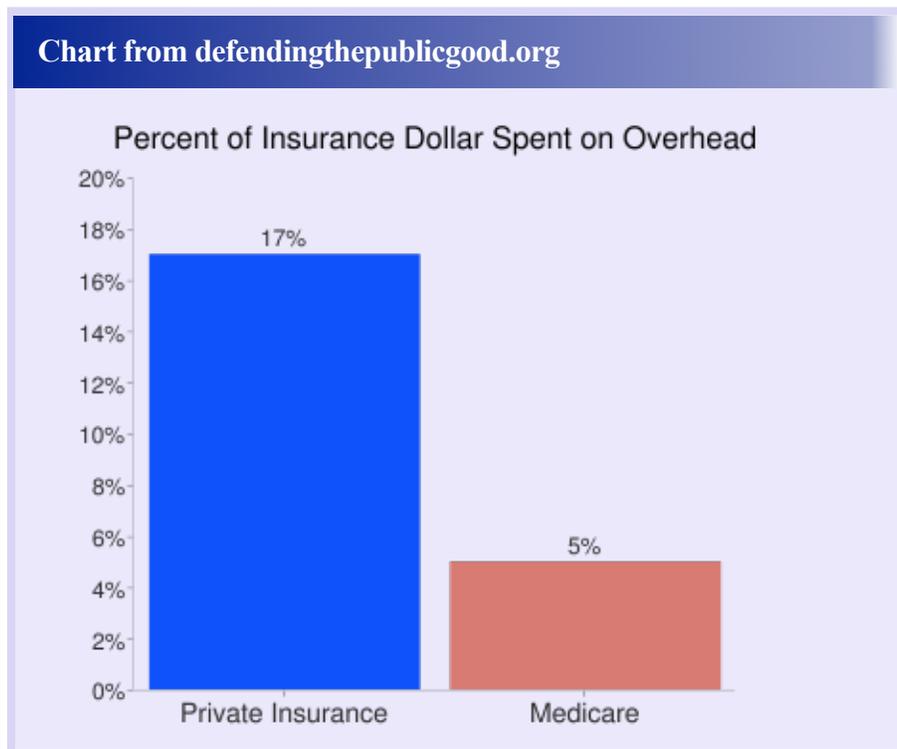
Over the last year we've worked in the trenches with city officials and citizen groups in North and South Carolina and elsewhere to oppose legislative attempts by telecom companies to eliminate or severely restrict the ability of local governments to establish competitive networks. Several of our Op Eds were prominently featured in North Carolina's second largest daily newspaper. We talked to editorial boards to educate them on the issue and encourage them to formally oppose the bill introduced in N.C. We educated reporters and assisted community groups, using muninetworks.org to enable their work. (E.g. by cataloging resolutions passed by local governments against the state bill, leading to increased media coverage.) We also created a short video demonstrating the superiority of the two community fiber networks in the state over larger privately owned networks.

Although ultimately Time Warner gained a victory in North Carolina, we helped to focus national attention and outrage on its efforts and earned the praise of Catharine Rice, President of the SEATOA, an association of municipal telecom officials, "You've absolutely made an enormous difference on this issue and I thank you from all of North Carolina."

Defending the Public Good

As mentioned above, for much of our history, ILSR has focused on working in the trenches to establish successful demonstrations of local self-reliance. In the 1990s we added a focus on policy as we learned that the rules we designed enable or discourage local self-reliance. In 2011 we've concluded that the narrative itself is fundamental to guiding policy, which in turn guides and channels investment capital and entrepreneurial efforts. To inform the narrative we've added a new component to our work focusing on rehabilitating the word "public".

The program, called Defending the Public Good is under the direction of David Morris. Currently we are still feeling our way, testing the best strategies to achieve our objective.



In February we launched a new website, defendingthepublicgood.org. We do not envision the site as a place to go for information on current developments or as a library of reports on privatization efforts. There are a number of organizations already doing this, including several unions, Public Citizen and In The Public Interest. We do however expect that relevant legislation and pertinent reports will be integrated into our New Rules web site.

The blog itself at least will host in-depth commentaries that we hope can push back against the aggressive attack on the public. The essays are currently carried on several news blogs, including, *On the Commons*, *AlterNet*, and *Huffington Post*. *Some of the essays have gained very wide circulation. For example, the piece American Exceptionalism was carried by over 400 web sites and featured not only on AlterNet but also on MoveOn.org and the Wall Street Journal online. The piece was accessed directly over 10,000 times from our blog, giving significant visibility to the blog and our. A dozen library associations distributed our essay All Hail the Public Library. And a version will run in the Nation magazine in the fall of 2011. Another essay that offered empirical evidence that the public sector, not private corporations, often deliver services more effectively and less expensively, has received wide distribution as well.*

We are looking to widen the format used in this initiative, adding brief videos and podcasts to the written words in the coming year.

Institute for Local Self-Reliance

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