

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Mike Jacobs, The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

### **The Union of Concerned Scientists on Renewable Energy**

More generally the way that we get our energy supplies and the options that we have for energy supplies are really dependent upon the infrastructure, and in electricity that's generally the transmission system. So when we talk about renewable energy that comes from essentially rural areas like wind farms, the transmission system and its upgrades are absolutely central to that conversation. So we spend a fair amount of our time trying to sort out how transmission investments will be made and how to explain to folks how those investments serve the renewable energy goals that states may have adopted.

### **Energy Independence**

Well the concept of energy independence, from my understanding, was first raised by President Eisenhower, and I think every president essentially from that time on has raised it as an aspirational goal. That should mark to anybody that it's a concept, not exactly a practice that you can put into place in any kind of immediate time frame. What we understand that to mean, and we do share something of this kind of goal in the sense that there's an awful lot of renewable energy and efficiencies to be gained through better practices and better technologies that reduce our energy imports. So while we don't frame it as an energy independence topic, particularly, our sort of efforts are well aligned with that rhetorical position that national leaders have picked for 50-60 years.

### **Making Electricity "Visible"**

I can certainly see why people see transportation because it's much more visible; everybody uses it and they know when they're using it. With energy everybody uses it and they probably don't realize when they're using it. So we have to wait in line to get on the highway when it's crowded, we don't realize what it is to have a crowded electric transmission system, so it's out of sight. But one of the topics I'm working on with UCS has to do with people putting up their own solar panels on their own rooftops. So what happens when you do that is you turn consumers into producers and they, whether they realize it or not, start to interact with that invisible electric transmission system and there's a whole lot of topics that come out of that including how to better integrate what the consumer's doing with electricity and what the grid and the grid operators do.

### **Consumer Choice: Greater than Ever**

We've got an interesting dynamic in electricity. There's a strong state regulatory oversight and often those regulators are elected on the ballot and where they're not

elected on the ballot the elected governor appoints them, so the regulatory regime is determined by voters. And while that may be sort of several steps removed from what people think about everyday it's still obviously citizen action. But more relevant now I think are these things that consumers have in the way of choosing their electricity supplier and now even choosing solar for the rooftop, which makes them literally use their consumer to influence what happens on the grid. That—all that stuff is new because of the regulatory changes in the last 15-20 years, so we're really much more sort of closer to consumer choice. And many, many more people involved in energy supply than was the case when we were growing up 1965, 1970.

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