



New EmPower TN initiative set to cut state utility bills by an estimated 28% with energy efficiency and renewable energy

July 10th, 2015 > Clean Energy, Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, Solar > Taylor Allred >

Tennessee lawmakers have recently demonstrated that investing in clean energy is not a partisan issue, so much as it's just plain common sense. In the majority-Republican General Assembly, the state budget was approved with tens of millions of dollars for new investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy, predicted to yield *\$1 billion in savings* for the state's coffers.

In a move that will save taxpayers money and cut pollution, Tennessee will soon be significantly improving the energy efficiency of buildings owned and managed by the state, and also investing in up to 67 MW of solar energy. Gov. Bill Haslam's recently announced [EmPower TN](#) initiative has set a commendable goal of reducing the Volunteer State's utility operating costs by 28% over the next eight years. Kudos to the governor for stepping up to the plate and leading Tennessee toward a cleaner and less expensive energy future!



Dollars and Sense

The EmPower TN initiative will reduce energy consumption across the state through a

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[Renewable Energy \(122\)](#)

[Solar \(112\)](#)

[Wind energy \(161\)](#)

stated strategy of “measuring and controlling energy use, investing in increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, and creating an operational environment of excellence.” In addition to taking a big bite out of the state’s current \$192.5 million in annual utility bills, the initiative will also serve to promote energy efficiency and conservation in local government and the private sector.

The Tennessee General Assembly approved the first round of funding for the initiative as part of the state budget for 2015-2016. About \$44 million in funds are currently available for energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy management projects at state agencies and departments, including the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents systems. [Applications](#) for funding are due by July 24, and selected projects will be announced in the fall. Projects are expected to be concentrated on high efficiency lighting fixtures and controls; upgraded and improved efficiency heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems; and building energy management systems.

EmPower TN is expected to provide a total of \$200 million in initial funding from 2016-2019, with \$57 million in cumulative savings reinvested annually from 2020-2023, which will allow for a self-sustaining program. After 2023, EmPower TN investments are projected to yield \$53.9 million in annual operating cost reductions for the state, plus an additional \$12.1 million in annual savings that would be used in part to recover the cost of the initial investment. **All told, that \$200 million initial investment is**

expected to generate \$1 billion in savings by 2035.



“EmPower TN is Governor Haslam’s energy efficiency initiative to institute an enterprise-wide strategy for lowering costs through better energy management of state facilities,” said EmPower TN Director, Bob Balzar. “We are pleased with progress made leading to the July 24 deadline for state agency applications for energy efficiency projects, and look

forward to building on opportunities to save energy, money and help the environment of our great state.” Balzar brings extensive and highly relevant experience in utility management to EmPower TN, including as Vice President of Energy Efficiency and Demand Response at the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

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- [Wind Energy](#) (101)
- [Clean Fuel](#) (58)
- [Climate Action](#) (317)
 - [Extreme Weather](#) (35)
 - [International Climate Policy](#) (36)
- [Electric Vehicles](#) (38)
- [Energy Efficiency](#) (283)
 - [Renovation](#) (18)
 - [Utilities](#) (145)
- [Energy Policy](#) (222)
 - [Elections](#) (18)
 - [Energy Justice](#) (42)
- [Green Economy](#) (121)
- [High Risk Energy](#) (545)
 - [Coal](#) (246)
 - [Coal Ash](#) (73)
 - [Natural Gas](#) (3)
 - [Nuclear](#) (143)
 - [Offshore Drilling](#) (79)
 - [Tar Sands](#) (4)
- [Media Roundup](#) (10)
- [Miscellaneous](#) (20)
- [Other Reports](#) (25)
- [SACE Reports](#) (16)
- [SACE Videos](#) (5)
- [Special Events](#) (29)
- [Water](#) (71)

Archives

Select Month

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- [Allie Brown](#) (33)
- [Amelia Shenstone](#) (49)
- [Angela Garrone, Esq.](#) (67)
- [Anna Cayce Smit](#) (10)

Gov. Haslam and the General Assembly deserve to be commended for leading our state toward a cleaner energy future while saving Tennesseans money through energy efficiency and renewable energy. However, there is still work to be done to make sure that the example set by EmPower TN is followed by local governments and the private sector.

Tennesseans should contact their county and city officials to drive home the importance of energy efficiency and renewable energy, and encourage them to take advantage of valuable opportunities to reduce energy costs, including [Clean Tennessee Energy Grants](#) available through the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. The Clean Tennessee Energy Grants application deadline for this year has already passed, but citizens should encourage local government officials to begin planning proposals for the next round of grants as soon as possible.

While the state's electric utilities have a [long way to go](#) to catch up with regional and national leaders in energy efficiency, Tennesseans can help by spreading awareness in their communities that most residents and businesses can benefit from valuable rebates and services available through [TVA](#) and the local power companies it serves. Additionally, lower-income individuals can take charge of their utility bills by applying for free home retrofits through their [local community action agencies](#) as part the federal [Weatherization Assistance Program](#).

Tennesseans who are interested in investing in renewable energy can apply through TVA's [Green Power Providers](#) (residential) or [Solar Solutions Initiative](#) (commercial) programs, or do their part by purchasing blocks of renewable energy through the [Green Power Switch](#) program for only \$4 per month.

Those who live in other states should let their elected officials know the good news about EmPower TN, and look into energy efficiency and renewable energy opportunities available through their states, local utilities, and community action agencies.

Investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy is paving the path to our clean energy future, but Tennessee's example shows that the clean energy economy is

[Anne Gilliam Blair](#) (36)
[Charlie Coggeshall](#) (14)
[Chris Carnevale](#) (68)
[David Roman](#) (3)
[Stephen Smith](#) (130)
[George Cavros](#) (7)
[Guest Post](#) (197)
[Isabel Villalon](#) (6)
[Jeannie McKinney](#) (19)
[Jennifer Rennicks](#) (113)
[Jimmy Green](#) (10)
[Joan Walker](#) (40)
[John Bonitz](#) (22)
[John D. Wilson](#) (87)
[Josh Galperin](#) (41)
[Kacy Rohn](#) (6)
[Mandy Hancock](#) (20)
[Maria Hubert](#) (5)
[Natalie Mims](#) (31)
[Nick Alderson](#) (2)
[Rachel Grillo](#) (1)
[Sara Barczak](#) (63)
[Seandra Rawls](#) (10)
[Simon Mahan](#) (117)
[Susan Glickman](#) (9)
[Taylor Allred](#) (12)
[Tom Larson](#) (14)
[Toni Nelson](#) (6)
[Ulla-Britt Reeves](#) (36)

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already benefitting us today. So why wait? Tennessee sure isn't.

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