

15th ANNUAL HEINZ AWARDS

RECIPIENT BACKGROUNDER

Thomas Smith, 59, Austin, Texas

Thomas “Smitty” Smith is honored for his work as one of the most effective renewable energy advocates in Texas. He has been an essential player in the key pieces of legislation that have addressed both energy efficiency and the development of renewable sources of energy. His work in crafting and passing the Texas Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) is now being adopted in many other parts of the country and has made Texas a leader in wind energy creation, and has put it on the path to lead in solar energy as well.

Since 1985, Mr. Smith has served as director of the Texas office of Public Citizen, a consumer and environmental group active in areas concerning energy, environment and other socio-economic issues. His efforts in passing the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP), his work on expanding solar energy generation and the passage of the RPS are three of his most noteworthy accomplishments.

Mr. Smith has long believed that the fastest and cheapest way to reduce air pollution and slow global warming is to make things run more efficiently first, and only then begin to develop renewable energy. He estimates that each dollar spent on efficiency yields three dollars of savings in energy costs, which makes investment in renewable energy increasingly attractive. Mr. Smith helped to design major legislative reforms to Texas energy efficiency programs in 1999 and 2007.

Mr. Smith co-founded Solar Austin, a program that advocates for the use of solar power to accelerate the city’s transition to clean, renewable energy. As a result of organizing citizens and collaborating with city council and Austin Energy executives, the city’s electric utility set a goal of 100 MW for the installation of solar energy by 2020 which was the largest in nation at that time and offered the highest incentives in the country for installing solar panels on customers’ homes. In addition, Austin Energy is planning a photovoltaic solar power plant that would be the largest installation of tracking solar photovoltaic panels the United States. Largely due to his efforts to garner support for the legislation in 1999 and 2005, Texas has become the nation’s leader in installed wind energy. As a result, over 9,000 people have been employed building wind plants.

Said Teresa Heinz, chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation:

“When we hear “Texas,” we don’t think renewable energy. We think oil—refineries and wells. But thanks to Heinz Award recipient Thomas Smith, the Lone Star state is leading the way in both energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy like wind and solar. Mr. Smith looked out at what most people would have seen as a wall of improbability, he saw a way to change the state through hard work, community and inexhaustible determination and the country and the planet will benefit greatly from his efforts.”

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