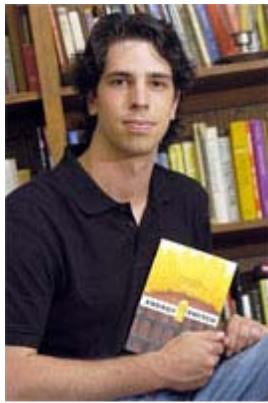


## Exchange student compares U.S., German energy policies

08/09/07 *By Michael Cody*



Nathan Hopkins recently returned from a year in Germany, where he worked with Craig Morris, author of "Energy Switch: Proven Solutions for a Renewable Future."

Imagine a sunny suburb in which more residents have solar panels on their rooftops than don't, and the power company buys more energy than it sells.

This place exists. It's the district of Vauban, near Freiburg, in southwest Germany -- and Nathan Hopkins has been there.

In fact, he has spent a lot of time reading and thinking about how solar energy became so popular there.

Hopkins, 24, is a Phoenix resident who graduated from Dulaney High School in 2001, then earned a bachelor's degree from New York University in 2005.

That summer, he traveled across Europe with a book by Paul Roberts, "The End of Oil," in his backpack; the next summer, he interrupted his studies at the University of Maryland Law School for a fellowship that sends 75 Americans to Germany, and 75 Germans to the United States, each year.

Known as the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange, it was created by Congress and the German parliament during the Cold War, and includes language training, university studies and an internship for every participant.

"The idea is to experience the whole of German life, from schools to the social life to the work environment," Hopkins explained.

Hopkins, who didn't study German at Dulaney or NYU, was chosen in March 2006 from among hundreds of U.S. applicants for the fellowship, which allows winners to live anywhere in Germany they choose. He chose a hotbed of renewable energy, Freiburg.

First, however, he had to attend an orientation seminar in Washington in July; then two months of language classes in Saarbruecken, a German city northwest of Freiburg.

"I felt like I knew nothing at the end," Hopkins joked. But it was enough to get started.

At the University of Freiburg, he took classes in economic policy, in philosophy and environmental ethics, and in German grammar and speech.

The economics class was taught in English, as is common in German schools. The philosophy and environmental classes were not, "so I didn't understand so much," Hopkins said. (He did get many of the books on the reading list in English, which helped.)

Hopkins served one internship, with the International Solar Energy Society; then lucked into another, with Craig Morris, author of "Energy Switch: Proven Solutions for a Renewable Future," after reading the book and asking for an interview.

"I ended up working for him, writing articles," Hopkins said.

He and Morris are talking with editors who might publish a 3,000-word article they wrote, "Home-grown juice: Why the U.S. is so far behind Germany in renewables," he said.

The article lays out arguments for a policy instrument known as feed-in tariffs, which require power companies to pay specific prices for energy from various renewable sources, such as solar panels, without any negotiation with sellers, such as the residents of Vauban. The government sets the prices, which guarantee profits to ordinary citizens as well as to large suppliers, and which don't favor one source of renewable energy -- wind, for example -- over another.

In the article, Hopkins and Morris liken energy sources to fruit, and suggest the benefits that come from feed-in tariffs, from rapid development of different technologies to progress toward energy independence.

"Just as this policy gives similar incentive to grow plums and bananas, (it) promotes solar and wind equally," they write. "The result is something of a renewable energy fruit salad."

Hopkins, who returned to the United States in mid-July, soon will resume his studies at Maryland, with an improved focus on coordinating economic, environmental and social policies in an approach known as sustainability.

He is considering a career in government or private industry.

For information on the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange, call 212-497-3522 or go to [www.cdsintl.org/cbyx](http://www.cdsintl.org/cbyx).