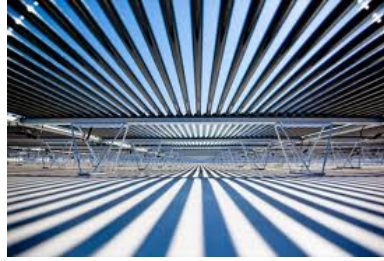


A Perspective on Solyndra



The spectacular - and spectacularly controversial - Solyndra bankruptcy has colored the entire renewable energy dialogue by shining an intense political spotlight on a \$500 million bad apple. Regrettably, this public relations debacle for the solar industry, the Department of Energy's Loan Guarantee Program and indeed, the Oval Office, has shifted attention away from the considerable economic and technological benefits that have derived from our largely successful efforts to help move America's energy industry into the 21st century.

In typical political fashion, Solyndra has provided an ample supply of fuel to those who are resisting the development of renewable energy resources – those who either can't read the writing on the wall; who refuse to acknowledge the message; or who fear the implications.

Solyndra provides a convenient, albeit foolish excuse for decision makers to abandon – or significantly reduce – our commitment to clean energy. But let's keep a proper perspective.

Over the past decade, the cost to taxpayers of failed U.S. satellites runs well into the billions of dollars.

- In June 2011 the Arizona Republic reported on “the second unsuccessful launch in two years of a Taurus XL rocket and an Orbital-built NASA Earth-orbiting satellite . . . projects that cost \$700 million and years of space-science work”
- In August 2010 Aviation Week reported that “U.S. Air Force officials are still assessing how best to transfer the \$2 billion Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) satellite into geosynchronous orbit after a disappointing problem with its liquid apogee engine.”
- In 2009 NASA lost the \$278 million Orbiting Carbon Observatory.

I could go on.

To be sure, the government and its private sector partners have not abandoned such extra-terrestrial efforts. They recognize that the stakes are high and that progress is often accompanied by failure and setbacks.

Of course, there is very little incumbent opposition to launching military or scientific payloads. Such initiatives do not challenge the status quo or threaten the livelihoods of fossil-based companies and their lobbyists.

In today's increasingly polarized political and economic environment, it's so easy to assail leaders who challenge, and so tempting to cast stones through the windows of progress.

Reshaping a century-old energy industry is no easy task. It does not come cheaply, easily or without risk. The failure of Solyndra should be viewed in the context of a broad-based effort that has created far more winners than losers, and that promises to benefit our citizens for generations to come.

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