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A Proper Perspective for Solar Energy

A certain “watchdog” group is vocally arguing that increased generation of solar energy will result in higher electric bills and significantly impact our water supply. Their arguments sidestep the realities of conventional electricity rates and only selectively address the science of solar energy technologies. Perhaps more important, they dismiss the economic and societal benefits of cultivating solar and other clean energy resources as a supplement to conventional sources.

Electricity rates based on conventional generation have been rising, and **even if we do nothing** – even if we do not stimulate the development of solar and other renewable energy solutions – then our electric bills will likely continue to increase in any event.

Then there is the issue of water. Most solar energy technologies do not require significant amounts of water, and many, including all forms of photovoltaics, the Stirling Energy SunCatcher and EnviroMission Solar Tower, require virtually none. By contrast, significant amounts of water are currently being consumed by the nuclear and coal industries. And when we consider the prospect of developing solar arrays on land currently being farmed, let’s keep in mind that agriculture consumes far more water than any solar technology that might be constructed on comparable land.

In addition, to those who decry the very thought of subsidizing the development of renewable energy, let’s not forget the extraordinary level of subsidies and direct taxes levied upon Americans over the past several decades in connection with the development of the oil, gas and nuclear energy industries.

Once installed on a roof or constructed on the ground, the incremental cost of harnessing the daily abundance of sun to generate solar energy is minimal, compared with the ongoing efforts to mine and transport coal, extract, contain and transport natural gas and safely split atoms.

This intuitive elegance of solar energy is leading to a profound change within modern society.

Most of the advanced countries on this planet recognize the legacy of fossil fuels and have made bold and far reaching commitments to address the status quo. Japan, Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Norway, China and many countries are transforming their energy footprint. While these efforts were not without cost, they have resulted in a most beneficial trade-off. Solar energy is now a multi-billion dollar global business. Ongoing R&D and manufacturing improvements are driving down production costs in a process not unlike what has occurred in the electronics industry.

Companies from Japan, Germany, Spain and China who have invested in solar technologies now dominate this rapidly growing industry. As a result, German, Japanese, Spanish and Chinese companies are aggressively and profitably exporting their products and technologies to America and the rest of the world.

Leaders in these countries saw the writing on the wall. They chose progress over an unacceptable alternative and embraced both the environmental and economic development imperatives of solar energy. They had the foresight to recognize that fostering adoption of solar energy would eventually yield extraordinary economic and societal returns by creating vibrant industrial ecosystems.

We have lessons to learn and choices to make in this country and this state. Let’s embrace change and take proactive steps to strengthen our economy, create high-wage jobs and restore our global competitiveness.

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