

More Solar, Not Less

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/van-jones/net-metering-solar_b_1537713.html?show_comment_id=156436352#comment_156436352

If you listen only to the propaganda machine of the Koch Brothers, the power companies and the "clean coal" industry, solar power is only desirable to a white rich ex-hippie with a Malibu beach house.

Their latest tactic is to paint local clean energy, such as rooftop solar, as an elitist energy source that low-income Californians and people of color are subsidizing.

Pitting the interests of low-income ratepayers and people of color in California against the solar industry and clean energy future is wrong and won't work. Ask the Texas oil companies that tried to pass Proposition 23 in 2010, which would have repealed the state's pioneering clean energy law, AB 32. Voters of color and residents from low-income communities overwhelmingly rejected that proposition because they understood that California's climate policies were good for their health and the economy.

A 2011 [poll](#) by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 79% of Asians, 83% of Blacks and 88% Latinos think that climate change is a serious threat to the economy and their quality of life. That same poll found that people of color believe more strongly than the general population that it is necessary to take steps immediately to counter the effects of climate change. People of color are the strongest supporters of a clean energy and climate change fighting agenda in California.

When it's done right, low-income Californians and people of color have more to gain from the widespread adoption of local clean energy than anyone else. The more solar power that comes online, the faster we will be able to turn off the dirtiest power plants -- "peaker" plants -- which are the most polluting, least efficient and most expensive source of power we have.?

Most "peaker" plants are located in our poorest communities. If there are subsidies that need to end, it's the subsidies to dirty energy producers and the heavy price poor Californians pay with their health as a result of last century's pollution based power system.

Today, local clean energy like solar is making strong inroads in lower and middle-income communities. Innovative financing programs are changing the demographics of solar customers in California. According to the [PV Solar Report](#), nearly two thirds of California home solar installations in 2009, 2010 and 2011 were in zip codes with median annual household incomes between \$40,000 and \$85,000 and not in the wealthiest areas of the state?

Oakland-based Solar Mosaic is using creative, crowd-sourced financing to spread the benefits even further. Ultimately what is needed are incentives, which assure the availability of local clean energy in California's lowest income communities.

Central to the move towards localized clean energy is a little-known policy called "net metering." This policy, pioneered in California and now copied by 43 other states, is a simple billing arrangement that ensures solar customers receive fair credit for the electricity their systems generate. It operates like rollover minutes on a cell phone. When the customer doesn't use all the power from their rooftop solar panels, the extra energy is sent back onto the electric grid for the benefit of other customers. In turn, the solar customer owner gets credit on their electric bill. Today, there are over 100,000 rooftop solar energy systems in California and net metering is the policy responsible for 99% of them.

The savings to regular folks is significant, which is why the utilities are so worried about this threat to their monopoly.

With the Public Utilities Commission poised to boost the net metering program later this month, utilities are trying to make an end-run to halt their action in the Legislature. Lawmakers would be wise to reject

that bill and support policies that expand clean energy for low and middle-income communities. One such bill is the "Solar For All" legislation introduced by Assemblymember Fong that provides further incentives for renewable energy in low-income communities.

We have an opportunity to build a clean energy system that is good for all of California's residents, businesses and the planet. But to do so we need bold, holistic and comprehensive strategies that wean us off fossil fuels. The utilities' opposition to local clean energy, and in this case, to net metering, sends us in the wrong direction: backwards.

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