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Lawmakers Forecast Sunny Session for Solar Power

New Study Shows Proposed Legislation Would Create 22,000 Jobs, Reduce CO2 emissions by 29 million tons

AUSTIN – A bi-partisan group of legislators predicted a 'sunny' legislative session for bills promoting the development of solar power technologies in the state of Texas. Pointing to a new analysis of solar's economic development potential, the group declared that a robust solar program would help put Texans back to work and position the state as a world leader for solar production.

"The sun that strikes Texas' buildings and soil each day has the potential to power the state many times over – and the technologies needed to harvest that energy are already here," said Sen. Troy Fraser, Chairman of the Senate Business and Commerce committee and author of SB 545, legislation creating a rebate program to make it easier for Texans to install solar on their homes and businesses. "The question facing Texas is whether we will lead the solar energy revolution – bringing good jobs and clean power to our state – or whether we will lag behind."

At least eighteen bills have already been filed to support the deployment of solar technologies, by legislators in both chambers and across the ideological spectrum.

HB 278 (Anchia, D-Dallas) and SB 427 (Shapiro, R-Plano) would require the state's electric utilities to support the development of 2000 megawatts of solar and other on-site renewable technologies by offering direct incentives to consumers and businesses. According to a new report by Environment Texas, Public Citizen and Vote Solar, such a standard could lead to installations on as many as 500,000 roofs in Texas by 2020 at a cost of about 98 cents per month per Texan. This investment would create an estimated 22,000 jobs and reduce emissions of carbon dioxide emissions by 29 million tons, the equivalent of taking 4.3 million cars off the road for a year.

“In Texas, we know how to build cutting-edge industries from the bottom up,” said Rep. Rafael Anchia. “Our state’s role in the creation of the Microcomputer Consortium and Sematech led to the creation of a multibillion dollar manufacturing center that has employed tens of thousands of people. We now have a similar opportunity in the development of solar power.”

In order to help promote manufacturing of solar panels and other renewable technologies within the state of Texas, SB 541 (Watson, D-Austin) creates a special incentive rewarding electric providers who meet their renewable energy requirements with locally manufactured renewable energy.

"We're energy experts in Texas. We have led the nation in fossil fuel based energy, we have led the nation in the development of wind energy, and we can lead with the development of solar as well. I am excited to see so much support for this prospect in the legislature,” said State Senator Kirk Watson.

"As the unemployment rate rises here and across the nation, investing in solar energy is a smart way to put Texans back to work--it is estimated that for every new solar megawatt, at least 4 jobs are born in Texas, jobs that stay here." said Sen. Van de Putte, author of solar bills SB 598 (solar schools), SB 599 (sales tax exemption) and SB 600 (solar incentive program). "We must act now and we must act boldly to create thousands of clean energy jobs and improve our environment."

“Texas has the 'right stuff' to become a world leader in solar energy development – reaping the benefits of cleaner air, a robust economy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels,” said Luke Metzger, Director of Environment Texas and one of the report’s authors. “Creating a statewide rebate program for solar will give Texans more power over their electric bills and kick-start an economic boom for the state”.

“Experience in Germany, Japan, California and elsewhere has shown that solar incentives will lead to increased demand and lower prices,” said Tom “Smitty” Smith, Director of Public Citizen’s Texas office and an author of the solar report. “These are the first steps on the road to a robust, self-sufficient solar market in which government incentives are no longer necessary.”

Participating in today’s event were solar businesses such as Meridian Energy Systems, the Austin Chamber of Commerce, and environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense Fund. Events are also being held in Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Waco and Abilene.

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