

## **L.A. can lead the way with solar rooftops: Guest commentary**

*By Craig Lewis and Steve Westly*

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Too often campaign promises go unfulfilled. But for Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, keeping his word should be easy.

Mr. Garcetti was elected to office on a platform that called for a significant expansion of solar energy in L.A. And this promise is becoming more attractive by the day. The Department of Water and Power's newest solar program is already booming, while recent attempts at local oil production have proven disastrous. Just last month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency formally accused an oil operation of endangering nearby residents' health and safety. Hundreds of residents are now protesting the development of proposed oil wells in their south L.A. neighborhood.

In contrast to the public's dismay with oil drilling, an overwhelming majority of L.A. voters have steadfastly demanded that local solar power more of their city. City council members — as well as a broad coalition of business, civic, academic and environmental groups — have echoed the public's call.

To address this demand the DWP launched its CLEAN L.A. Solar program last year. Through this program, the utility pays customers for solar energy generated on rooftops throughout the city. CLEAN L.A. Solar is on pace to bring 150 megawatts of local solar online by 2016 — enough to power more than 32,000 homes. In addition to significantly reducing carbon emissions, CLEAN L.A. Solar also translates demand for clean energy into local economic growth. The program will create 4,500 jobs and generate \$500 million in economic activity according to the Los Angeles Business Council.

CLEAN L.A. Solar is a great starting point, but huge opportunities remain to power even more of the city with local renewable energy. In fact, within one week of opening the program, DWP had received applications to build more solar projects than the entire program currently allows. Such blistering market demand has prompted widespread calls to expand CLEAN L.A. Solar by a factor of four, and the DWP Board of Commissioners just moved to create a plan for increasing the size of the program.

A fourfold expansion of CLEAN L.A. Solar matches the plan Mayor Garcetti laid out while building support on the campaign trail. The Mayor promised to increase the production of local solar energy to 1,200 megawatts by 2016 — with at least 600 megawatts from the CLEAN L.A. Solar program. According to independent studies by UCLA and the Clean Coalition, expanding CLEAN L.A. Solar to this size would bring his city over 18,000 new job opportunities and up to \$2 billion in private investment.

Opponents of expanding solar power in L.A. continue clinging to the tired argument that renewables are too expensive. The economics have quickly changed though. Solar panels now cost 60 percent less than they did in 2011. Moreover, costs associated with the long-distance transmission of energy can comprise nearly 25 percent of the total price a consumer pays for energy. A big advantage of local solar projects is

that they generate energy close to where it is consumed — like on city rooftops — eliminating transmission costs. Local solar energy also protects city residents from the volatile costs of fossil fuels and ensures long-term, affordable energy prices. Once these benefits are accounted for, local solar offers an undeniably cost-effective source of power for the city.

With its abundant sunshine and vastly underutilized rooftops, solar energy is a natural fit for Los Angeles. The CLEAN L.A. Solar program has already proven that local solar is capable of providing clean, reliable, local electricity while also creating jobs and spurring private investment. With Mayor Garcetti's strong leadership, Los Angeles can secure its place in the sun as the nation's solar leader.

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