

Oped: L.A. shows that solar power isn't just for the wealthy

By Bill Gallegos

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CREATING a greener Los Angeles is everyone's responsibility. For too long, however, working-class neighborhoods and communities of color have been left out and left behind when it comes to building a healthier, more sustainable Los Angeles for ourselves and for future generations.

Solar power is a case in point. The benefits of powering our homes with clean, renewable energy are as clear as a sunny day - especially in a city powered so heavily by high-pollution coal plants. But the cost of buying, installing and maintaining solar panels - along with the need for customers to own their own homes - means that tapping this resource has been largely limited to affluent homeowners in L.A.'s more upscale communities.

Finally, the city of Los Angeles is doing something to make rooftop more accessible to all. Earlier this month, the City Council unanimously approved an innovative solar-energy program that represents an important step away from fossil-fuel dependence and toward a sustainable power supply that is inclusive, democratic and equitable. The mayor gave his full-fledged endorsement at a signing ceremony last week.

The [CLEAN LA](#) solar program will allow owners of multifamily residential buildings, as well as commercial and industrial property owners, to install solar panels on their roofs and then sell the power generated back to the Department of Water and Power. In addition to clean energy, the program will generate significant cost savings that can be passed along to residents and create well-paying jobs - in all of our communities.

[Communities for a Better Environment](#) was proud to join labor, business, and other nonprofit groups in a citywide coalition led by the Los Angeles Business Council in support of the CLEAN LA program. Securing passage of the program was an important step; we must be vigilant in making it sure it is implemented quickly and in a way that let the entire city participate in our emerging green economy - not just a privileged few.

The CLEAN LA solar program will also deliver much-needed economic benefits to areas of L.A. that need them the most - neighborhoods I've been fighting for for almost 30 years.

A study released by the LABC Institute in partnership with UCLA and USC found that Los Angeles has a significant "workforce in waiting" trained for solar jobs in installation, design, sales and other fields. These workers - whose ranks are growing by an estimated 2,200 each year in L.A. County - are the product of numerous job-training programs located in areas with particularly high unemployment and high minority populations, such as East L.A. and parts of the San Fernando Valley.

As it happens, these regions are also solar "hotspots" - flat areas with large exposed roofs that offer the most promise for solar generation. With the potential to create 4,500 jobs by 2016 and spur \$500 million in new local investment, the CLEAN LA program is a major step toward jumpstarting our economy as well as supporting greater environmental justice.

The CLEAN LA program relies on a mechanism called a solar feed-in tariff, or FiT, a well-tested mechanism that has created hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and has been used with great success in Europe and other cities in the U.S.

The city-approved ordinance authorizes DWP's General Manager Ron Nichols to move forward with a 75 megawatt FiT program - enough to power roughly 15,000 typical L.A. homes. The FiT would expand to 150 megawatts in 2016, with a goal of reaching 600 megawatts by 2020. That would be enough to power 120,000 homes, create 18,000 jobs, and offset 600,000 tons of carbon dioxide every year from the DWP's power mix.

Not only is this the right program for L.A.'s diverse communities, it will help Los Angeles comply with the terms of SB 32 - the state law mandating 750 MW of Solar FiT. It will also fulfill a pledge made by Mayor Villaraigosa to bring a 150-megawatt FiT program to the city by 2016.

At [Communities for a Better Environment](#), we are guided and energized by the idea that "a new world is possible." The CLEAN LA solar program can be an important step toward creating quality jobs and a new world that is fairer, greener, and more sustainable for every community of L.A.

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