Executing Renewable Energy Policy in Texas

Tom Thompson, CEO GridWerks Consulting, Inc. & NYSES Board Member

I just returned from Solar Power International in Dallas, Texas, hosted by the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA). This is the nation's biggest solar trade show with almost 25,000 people and 1,200 exhibitors from 125 countries represented. Texas is home to America's largest wind power deployments, due in large part to republican governors, George W. and Rick Perry. Yet, the State of Texas is more in the news today about the current (and the former) Governor's penchant for executing prisoners and, more recently, for presidential candidate Perry's energy policy speech, where he champions the Keystone pipeline and other fossil resources while condemning renewables and environmental protection to a death sentence.

Of course, the truth is much different. In the face of the overhyped Solyndra meltdown (listen to Barncat Jones sing *Love Me Tender, Solyndra*), SEIA has been positively and aggressively promoting the benefits of solar power to the media, the membership and the general public. For if there is one thing we know @ NYSES, more burning and more splitting of atoms is not going to get us to the American Dream. Indeed, as the SEIA talking points link above shows, the U.S. exported more PV technology to China last year than China to the U.S. Further, over 100,000 Americans are working in the solar field today, and that number will only grow as the technology becomes more affordable and efficient.

So, what was new about the show? Well, PV module prices, driven by Chinese manufacturers, are at or below $1/watt. While this is astounding to us industry veterans and generally good for the consumer, it has been problematic for U.S. module manufacturers. Hence, the big news was that American module makers did something about it during the show, filing an anti-dumping complaint, led by SolarWorld. This high profile action tended to downplay other news, such as the emergence of energy storage technologies to aid the use of renewables in the grid.

So, the battle rages. Increasingly, the battle lines in the renewable business are bifurcating. Historically, it has been the renewable industry versus the utility industry where the policy battles have been fought. However, as evidenced by the Solar World complaint, there are now battle lines forming within our industry – between smaller integrators (who prefer Feed-in Tariff incentive structures) and larger ones (who prefer SREC's) as well as between U.S. and Asian manufacturers. To me, the most challenging aspect of this issue is that we are now in a situation where the interests of American manufacturers are pitted against those of American consumers. This battle will play out over the next few months.

In the meantime, NYSES continues to host a most progressive, informative program series on how renewables can be part of our energy mix in a cost-effective, job-creating way. Please come to NYSES's next event on October 31st at the Crown Plaza in Albany. This event is featuring the exciting works of Dr. Richard Perez of SUNY ASRC on the role of PV in saving our grid while saving our pocket books, and that of Dr. Pradeep Haldar of the SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering. CNSE was recently awarded a DOE SunShot grant for the creation of a solar incubator in the Albany Capitol district.

I look forward to seeing you there. Tom

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