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Who Advances Solar: Individuals or Companies?

FRESNO—California has the largest solar market in the United States, yet sections of that market have not always advanced at the same pace.

In 2014, California passed a solar energy mandate that requires all construction on low-rise residences to feature solar cell installation. However, the same mandate requires that new commercial and industrial spaces merely have “solar ready” roofs, built with specifications that would make it architecturally possible to install solar panels at a later date.

More solar energy production is unquestionably good, but corporate power seems to be influencing who shoulders the burden.

The vast, flat-roofed and sun-drenched expenses that characterize commercial properties in California are even more suited to solar installation than our residences’ roofs. Commercial and industrial properties also use more electricity, representing about 50% of end-use electrical consumption compared to 20% for residences. Yet commercial property emerges less encumbered.

If the goal is truly to advance our entire state for the good of us all, then the mandate should be applied more equally. The commercial and industrial properties should be producing electricity, just like residences.

There has been a concerted effort for decades to push the responsibility of climate change mitigation onto the individual rather than onto corporations.

The publicized recycling movement, often dropping the much more important “reduce and reuse” portions of the slogan, has often been a distraction that takes focus away from the reckless waste of corporations and onto the performance of individuals. Applying a solar mandate only to residences while skipping over commercial and industrial properties does much the same.

The current state solar mandate applies only to residential buildings less than three stories, so perhaps there might be a slight new incentive toward construction of higher-density housing, something our sprawling state is deficient in. The mandate also comes with other energy-saving regulations, expanding the Title 24 rules that have for decades made California’s energy consumption per person flatline as the rest of the country skyrockets.

California is currently 48th in the country for per-capita energy use. This record, along with the efforts in lessening Southern California’s dreadful smog, show that these statewide mandates and regulations can have real life-saving effects. Businesses should not be allowed to weasel out of the way.

Two of our greatest long-term problems in California are high residential property values and the effects of climate change on our weather, our water and our fire seasons. The cost of living should not have to take the entire burden alone. Commercial and industrial properties should do their part too as our economy races toward renewable electricity, as that is the only future that can save our lives.

For more information, contact the Fresno County Democratic Party at 559-495-0606 or dems@fresnocountydemocrats.org.