

Solar is growing in Ohio without Turning Point

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The wind and solar developers who supported Ohio's energy-portfolio mandates and using hidden taxes in utility bills to fund their pet projects have been quick to attack critics.

That attack came to Ohio recently when the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio ruled against a proposal that would have imposed a \$357 million "tax" on American Electric Power customers to subsidize a 49.5-megawatt solar project called Turning Point. Based on the evidence, the PUCO ruled that forcing customers to pay for Turning Point was not necessary because sufficient supplies of solar-generated electricity are readily available in Ohio.

Following the decision, the "mandaters" and some newspapers attacked the PUCO's decision. Their attack is shortsighted and fails to bring much-needed attention to the anti-competitive, anti-solar and anti-consumer effects of Turning Point.

The claim that Turning Point is needed to satisfy the solar mandates assumed that, without it, there would not be enough solar-electricity production in Ohio. But thanks to the voluntary efforts of hundreds of residential, commercial and industrial customers throughout Ohio, there is plenty of solar-electricity production in Ohio. In 2012 alone, voluntary choices by hundreds of Ohioans have produced more than 33 megawatts of new solar-electricity-generating projects that have been certified by the PUCO as renewable-energy resources. Each megawatt-hour from these consumer-driven solar facilities yields a solar renewable energy certificate, or SREC, which can be sold to help cover a portion of the cost. As a supporter of Turning Point recently acknowledged, the project would mean that "SREC prices will almost certainly plunge to 'junk' status once the project is complete," which would hurt solar developers elsewhere.

The PUCO's approval is not required to build Turning Point. The proponents of the project could have moved forward in October 2010 when it was announced. They claim that Turning Point can stand on its own in the competitive market without the benefit of a new consumer tax.

Yet they continue to attack the PUCO for not helping them raise electric bills so that Turning Point's developers don't have to obtain funding support the old-fashioned way: by earning it.

As counsel to Industrial Energy Users-Ohio, I know that solar investment is alive and well in Ohio thanks to the "customer choice" structure of Ohio law that includes "net metering" and streamlined interconnection rules. Turning Point is not needed. And, had the PUCO found otherwise, it would have hurt the hundreds of Ohioans who were investing in solar while Turning Point's proponents were pushing for more government mandates and more hidden taxes in utility bills.

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