

Opinion

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OUR VOICE

Tap the power of the sun

STOCKEXCHANGE

In the Coachella Valley, surrounded by majestic mountains under a canopy of blue sky, it seems like every day is Earth Day.

With a billion dollars worth of windmills spinning at the west end of our valley, geothermal plants bubbling in the east and solar panels shimmering on rooftops in between, there is a heightened awareness of the promise of green energy.

The promise got a surge last week when Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill into law requiring that the utilities generate a third of their power from renewable resources by 2020.

Wesley Ahlgren, chief operating officer of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, said the new law “positions the Coachella Valley to become the epicenter of renewable energy in the nation.”

Although we’re concerned about the aggressive push sending electricity rates higher — a serious issue for getting through our long, hot summers — the prospect of expanding the desert’s renewable energy industry is a promising development.

Huge energy plant in the sky

Solar power has a long history in the Coachella Valley. Take the case of Frank Binford, who opened Solar Distributors Inc. in Palm Desert in 1978. Binford was a pioneer and a visionary who saw that placing photovoltaic panels on rooftops could be a longlasting gift.

“God gave us this huge energy plant in

the sky,” he reflects. “I had to do something that was more than running a business; I had to do something for the generations to come.”

Palm Desert has been a national leader in energy efficiency, setting a goal to reduce citywide electricity consumption by 30 percent. Its program to help homeowners finance solar panels is on hold because of a federal ruling that restricts such loans. Thursday night, the City Council hired EcoMotion to lobby to overturn the ruling. We hope Palm Desert succeeds, not just for the city but for 25 other states that have launched similar programs.

The California Legislature has long debated paying solar panel owners for electricity they generate beyond their needs. The California Public Utilities Commission is debating just how that would work. For those who can afford to install solar panels, not needing to pay for electricity is a dream come true. Getting paid for excess energy is icing on the cake and a genuine incentive.

Projects throughout the Coachella Valley

Several large solar projects are in progress in the valley:

- Palm Springs plans to install solar panels atop the convention center and possibly another site, said Sustainability Manager Michelle Mician. The city has contracted with Chevron Energy Solutions to develop the plan, which will be presented Tuesday to the Sustainability Commission and next month to the City Council.

- College of the Desert has hired HGA, a Santa Monica-based firm, to design its environmentally friendly west valley campus in Palm Springs. The campus will include a 60-acre “green park” of solar panels.

- Sunvalley Solar of Walnut has signed a contract to install 1,528 solar panels atop the packing facility of Sea View Ranch, a major kumquat and lime grower in Oasis.

Projects that generate power on site — without the need for added transmission lines — make sense. Solar power should be considered for every public project.

Down on the solar farm

A major boost on the governor’s goal

Earth Day events

Founded by U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson, the first Earth Day was held April 22, 1970, to raise awareness of the damage mankind has been wreaking on the environment. It has grown into a powerful international movement. Some areas have expanded it to Earth Week, April 16-22.

- The Palm Springs Sustainability Commission will celebrate the day at 3:30 p.m. Thursday at Demuth Community Center, 3601 E. Mesquite Ave. The free event will feature free reusable shopping bags and other goodies, and a preview of plans for a community garden. **More information:** Call (760) 323-8214 or visit www.yoursustainablecity.com

- The S.C.R.A.P. Gallery will hold a Earth on Edge 2 celebration on Earth Day itself, Friday. The exhibit “Bugged — The Art of Insects,” featuring artwork using reclaimed and recycled materials, debuts at 6 p.m. at the Green Zone, 75-181 Mediterranean, Palm Desert. At 7 p.m. is the debut of “Carbon Zone,” part of the inaugural Green Earth Film Festival. **More information:** Call (760) 863-7777 or (866) 71-SCRAP or visit www.scrapgallery.org

- More Green Earth Film Festival will be shown at Desert EcoFest from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at Agua Soleil, 14500 Palm Drive, Desert Hot Springs. Co-sponsored by the Natural Science Collaborative, EcoFest will feature several speakers and activities. **More information:** Call (760) 329-4481 or visit desertecoevents.org

Read the full text of the renewable energy law at mydesert.com

should come from the mammoth solar farms planned between here and Blythe.

The vast solar farms aren’t generally the kind of project Earth Day enthusiasts generally embrace, considering they make the land uninhabitable. Environmentalists, such as the National Resources Defense Council, are watching the Bureau of Land Management to make sure the locations of the solar farms have the least possible impact on the environment. On Friday, the BLM extended the public comment period in the location process.

Riverside East Zone, is on a fast track for approval. Four projects will cover 202,000 acres and generate 18,000-32,000 megawatts — enough to power 320,000 homes. The project would generate up to 11,000 permanent jobs and pump \$424 million into the economy. Using part of our vast desert for such a boost of solar power and the economy is a reasonable tradeoff.

Keep a close eye on costs

The Desert Sun believes the law signed by Gov. Brown is good news for the valley’s renewable energy industry. We just hope it won’t be bad news for

residential customers who can’t afford solar panels. Business groups estimate it could increase electric rates as much as 7 percent.

A PUC spokesman added there also would be indirect costs, such as new transmission lines. But he also said solar power costs have come down in the past few years. If that trend continues — and it should, if solar power becomes more widespread — it might not be so bad.

Turn the oil tankers around

Even if you don’t believe climate change is real, there are many reasons to support renewable energy sources. Less carbon means cleaner air and a healthier environment in general. With turmoil in the Middle East, the less we rely on imported oil and fossil fuels in general, the better. Tell the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries we don’t need them.

We share the vision of Frank Binford of Solar Distributors Inc.

Let’s tap that huge energy plant in the sky as much as possible. Maybe by the 50th anniversary of Earth Day in 2020, these dreams will have come true.

Cars should be able to run on multiple fuels

Oil is selling for close to \$110 a barrel and gasoline for about \$4 a gallon. Bad news for motorists. Marvelous news for jihadis.

Iran’s rulers are using oil money to develop nuclear weapons and fund terrorists, including Hezbollah, now staging a slow-motion coup in Lebanon, and Hamas, which is committed to the extermination of Israel. A generous share of the money that goes to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations ends up in the coffers of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Hugo Chavez spends Venezuela’s petro-dollars to expand his influence, and that of his Iranian allies, throughout Latin America.

The war we are fighting in many parts of the world is unconventional but our enemies are not so different from those we have fought in the past. In the 20th century, free nations were threatened by Nazis, whose goal was global rule by a race, and communists, whose goal was global rule by a class. The

challenge today comes from regimes and movements committed to global rule by members of a religious group.

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill understood that Adolf Hitler could not prevail if Allied troops denied him access to the oil fields of North Africa and Central Asia. In the Cold War, Ronald Reagan’s use of economic weapons was key to bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We can’t deny oil to OPEC, the cartel that sits on more than three-quarters of the world’s conventional reserves. But we could implement policies designed to break oil’s virtual monopoly as a transportation fuel, stabilize and even reduce fuel prices and diminish the ability of hostile oil-producing regimes to wage economic warfare against us.

Such policies would include increasing domestic oil production, and speeding the pipeline project that would bring oil mined from Canadian sands to the U.S.



clifford d. may

Conservation is good, too. But these measures can be only part of the solution. Why?

As Jim Woolsey, former director of Central Intelligence and current chairman of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and Anne Korin, co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, noted, OPEC is “a conspiracy in restraint of trade.” That means that when non-OPEC countries “drill more, OPEC simply drills less and drives prices back up.” If demand is reduced through conservation, “OPEC again drills less and prices zip back up.”

What we desperately need: a competitive transportation fuel

market. If the price of Coke goes up, you can switch to Pepsi. If the price of beef climbs too high you can eat chicken. But when the price of gasoline goes up you have no choice but to pay or change your lifestyle.

Congress can begin to bring about consumer choice at the pump by adopting the Open Fuel Standard Act, soon to be reintroduced with bipartisan support. Woolsey and Korin emphasize: “An Open Fuel Standard would require new cars to include a \$100 tweak that would allow them to run on a variety of liquid fuels in addition to gasoline. Such fuels would include methanol, which is easily made from natural gas and biomass (and, less cleanly, from coal). Enabling vehicles to use natural gas, whether directly or via liquid fuels that are made from it, allows consumers to benefit from the very large cost advantage that natural gas holds today over oil.”

What about wind, solar and

nuclear power? At this point, they cannot be part of the solution because they cannot substitute for liquid transportation fuels.

Eventually, we probably will see electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles come on line in sufficient numbers to make an impact. But we can’t wait. There’s a war on.

To avoid losing that war we must reduce the power of oil, but not by limiting our mobility. Instead we can introduce fuel competition that will lead to fuel diversity and abundance.

Last week, President Barack Obama ridiculed those concerned about the rising cost of gasoline. “If you’re getting 8 miles a gallon you may want to think about a trade-in,” he said. Yes, but it’s not our clunker cars that need to be traded in. It’s our clunker energy policies and the clunker politicians responsible for them.

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INSIDE OPINION



Esther J. Cepeda

Parental involvement a huge factor in student and teacher success. **B14**



Valley Voice

Don’t blame unions for all that is wrong in the United States. **B14**



Letter of the week

Restaurant really did treat me and my late wife like family. **B15**