Panel Power: Solar Advocates Openly Celebrate Crony Capitalism

By Alex Berezow — May 9, 2018

Credit: Storyblocks [1]

The California Energy Commission just voted unanimously to require new homes to be constructed with solar panels. Amazingly, the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), a trade organization, openly bragged [2] about manipulating the government to force new homes to be equipped with solar panels.

"One of the more amazing things in environmental policy is how brazen solar advocates are when bragging about cronyist regulations that line their own pockets," Todd Myers wrote in a tweet [3]. Mr. Myers, who serves as environmental director at a free market think-tank called the Washington Policy Center, is absolutely right.

Crony capitalism is an unfortunate feature of life, but the shamelessness with which the solar industry acts is truly a sight to behold. Bill Gates could brag that the U.S. government still uses Windows, and pharmaceutical companies could boast their vaccines are so important to your health, that the government requires kids to get them before attending school. But they don't, because it would be rather unseemly.

The solar industry, however, has no such qualms because the energy equivalent of a "health halo" follows them around. Solar power is pure and righteous, therefore, cramming it down people's throats at a significant cost to taxpayers is not only a good thing to do, it's the moral and ethical thing to do.

Right? No, not even close. *The Economist* [4] describes solar subsidies as "massively wasteful and squalidly political."

Solar Subsidies Hose the Poor

Perhaps the biggest problem with solar subsidies is that they are regressive; i.e., they disproportionately hurt the poor. How does a subsidy hurt somebody? Because only rich people can afford to slap solar panels on their houses. Not only do they get a tax break, but in California, they can sell their unused energy back to the grid at an above-market rate. The utilities, in turn, pass these costs on to everybody else. That means poor people using coal in Compton are literally paying for solar panels for rich people in Malibu. That's plain nuts.

The new law, which requires new homes to be constructed with solar panels, is simply more of the same: It's a gigantic wealth transfer from the lower class to the upper class. In the Golden State, Robin Hood robs from the poor and gives to the solar industry.

Media Cheerleaders

Surely, the media -- which is concerned about income inequality -- is viciously opposed to this regressive policy. Just kidding. *The New York Times* [5] wrote:

> *Long a leader and trendsetter in its clean-energy goals, California took a giant step on Wednesday, becoming the first state to require all new homes to have solar power.*

As Mike Shellenberger, a California gubernatorial candidate, wrote [6]:

Mike Shellenberger ✔ @ShellenbergerMD · 5h
California's new solar roof law:

— was jammed through without expert or public review;

— is opposed by the state's leading energy economist;

— and will increase housing costs.

And yet there is not a single source critical of it in this New York Times article.

Oh well. Facts and data don't matter when something is done for a good cause.

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[1] https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/young-caucasian-man-installing-solar-panels-on-roof-technician-in-uniform-and-hard-hat-checking-solar-panel-on-roof-engineer-adjusting-solar-panel-vector-flat-design-illustration-square-layout-rmzbfxkvuzj5lw26zw
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