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## Commentary:

# Texas should build on a bright idea

**By Carrie Cullen Hitt, The Solar Alliance**

Optimism about Texas' solar energy potential is aglow in the Capitol.

State Sens. Troy Fraser, Kirk Watson, Leticia Van de Putte and Rodney Ellis and state Reps. Mark Strama and Rafael Anchia recently played host to a standing-room-only Capitol news conference, touting bills to spur the broad development of a job-producing solar energy industry in Texas. If you didn't have a TV camera or sharp elbows, you couldn't fit in the room. What a difference a few years make.

The solar industry has come of age in regions across the United States, Europe and Asia, delivering high value jobs and high return on investment. Manufacturing facilities are cropping up around the world while new markets are developing rapidly in response to customer demand. In Texas, this realization is hitting home — solar can create thousands of jobs and spur the Texas economy.

The knock on solar has been predictable: It might make you feel good, but it's too expensive. Today, the price of solar is falling as reliably as the cost of fossil fuels is increasing. The up-front cost of solar may be more than fossil fuel-based energy. But the fuel — the most volatile part of today's energy costs — is free. Solar is fast becoming a legitimate cost competitor to coal- and natural gas-fired electricity, and it's only going to get cheaper.

Even more powerful an argument can be made for the impact solar power would have on employing Texans. Every gigawatt of solar in Texas will spur a supply chain 25,000 jobs long. Given the estimates of Texas' solar potential, that could mean nearly 125,000 jobs by 2020. And that's not just manufacturing jobs in a handful of factories. More than 75 percent of the solar supply chain is local: installation and maintenance jobs where solar can be installed, which is every community in the state. No other industry or technology offers this kind of job creation potential in every county, city, district and neighborhood.

The Texas solar market could be huge. Our nearly 30 million residents use more power per capita than any other state. Becoming a leader today in the solar industry could establish Texas as a solar exporter tomorrow. Solar manufacturers consider a "shippable market" to be within a 1,000-mile radius of their plants. For most potential locations in Texas, that radius would encompass most of the United States. Texas' excellent international shipping capabilities would open Mexican and Central American markets as well.

The market is here for the taking, and Texas can get ahead of other states in short order.

But time is wasting. As with other emerging technologies, many regions in other states want to get into the solar race and become the "Silicon Valley of Solar." Other states recognized the potential earlier than Texas and are aggressively seeding their local solar markets.

Not surprisingly, California is leading the way. Its multiyear solar investment has had an incredible impact on private funding. Each dollar that California provided in solar incentives has spurred \$6 in private investment. In these economic times, that's a pretty good return. When the private sector believes that a state will support its effort, the money flows.

Solar energy development is coming to Texas. The choice before state lawmakers this session is whether they will seize the national momentum and spur the market here first — before it lands elsewhere — and bring with it the jobs that will power the rest of the county.

A serious, sustained investment in solar energy will do more than diversify the state's energy sources and clean the air. It will spur Texas' next generation of job growth and prosperity. Texans understand energy and the value in investing in the next big thing, and the Legislature is starting to understand as well.

**Hitt is president of The Solar Alliance, an advocacy group of firms involved in the design, manufacture, construction and financing of photovoltaic systems.**