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Politics Puts LA Solar Feed-in Tariff in the Shade



By BC Upham | April 7th, 2010 [View Comments](#)



The Los Angeles Business Council (LABC) could not have chosen a worse time to introduce [a feasibility study](#) (PDF) of a solar feed-in tariff for Los Angeles. The study, a joint project with the [UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation](#), shows how LA could add 500 megawatts of solar power over the next ten years by paying utility customers who install solar panels for any unused electricity the panels generate.

The problem is where to get the money to pay for it; typically it comes from rate payers in the form of higher energy bills. But Angelenos are already [up in arms](#) over rate hikes proposed last month by the Department of Water & Power.

The city council sharply reduced the hikes, prompting DWP to withhold \$80 million or so the city was counting on to help shore up a \$200 budget deficit.

(Ironically, those hikes were meant in part to pay for the Mayor's [ambitious renewable energy goals](#), including 150 MW of solar power.)

As a result, the political loggerheads surrounding the hikes overshadowed LABC's release of the FiT study, and, along with similar battles at the state level, helped cast doubt over the future of renewable energy initiatives across California.

"Pushing forward and falling back."

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and City Comptroller Wendy Gruel, who are in the thick of things at city hall, both spoke at the summit today.

Gruel emphasized how badly the city needs the DWP cash, or any cash at all. But she also called talk of renegeing on renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction commitments "disturbing."

On the state level, both Republican candidates for governor, Meg Whitman and Steve Poizner, [have called for postponing state law AB 32](#), which requires California to lower its emissions of greenhouses to 1990 levels by 2020. Poizner has also backed an [astroturf campaign](#) to get the law postponed until unemployment stays at or below 5.5 percent for a year.

Attorney General and Democratic candidate for governor Jerry Brown, who was at the Sustainability Summit today, danced around the issue of postponing AB 32, but called for the state to work within the limits of what it can do financially.

Brown, a veteran of California politics, made one of several memorable statement, calling governance a process of "pushing forward and falling back." Given the state of things in California, I would say we are definitely in "fall back" mode, and any plan to bring a FiT to Los Angeles in the near-term is just that: a plan.