

## **Texas Kills Solar Bill on Last-Minute Motion**

The sun isn't shining in Texas this morning.

A bill in the Texas legislature to create a \$500 million rebate program for utility-scale and small-scale solar installations – and jumpstart a Texas solar industry – died late on Friday night on a procedural maneuver. Several people who followed the bill closely said it wasn't voted down on the merits. It was derailed on a picayune legislative point about whether two bills should be melded together. The point, raised by Houston Democrat Sylvester Turner, was turned away, but by then it was too late. The clock had run out. In all likelihood, this means the Lone Star State won't be able to create any solar incentives until 2011.

Solar boosters are worried about the message this will send. "We will lose out on talent and manufacturing because the industry will either not locate in Texas or relocate to other states that have legislative support," says Raymond Walker, general counsel of Standard Renewable Energy, a Houston company that installs solar panels for homes and businesses.

The death of the bill was unexpected because it had strong support on both sides of the aisle – from rural Republicans such as bill sponsor Sen. Troy Fraser who saw the economic uplift created by wind farms in West Texas to urban Democrats who were in favor of the idea of boosting solar-installation jobs. The fate of the bill is also surprising because Texas' effort several years ago to create a wind industry has been so successful.

Still, despite the darkness that has descended on solar's Texas backers, some say there is reason to be positive. "What is interesting and what matters to us is that the chair of the Texas Business & Commerce Committee (Sen. Fraser) was the first person to introduce a solar bill," says Kari Smith, public affairs director for solar manufacturer SunPower Corp.

"It is not business as usual in Texas anymore. We've gone beyond this [as a] environmental versus big business issue," says Ms. Smith, pointing out that the bill had support from an ad-hoc coalition called Texas High-Tech for Solar that included Advanced Micro Devices Inc., Texas Instruments Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co. and General Electric Co.

Proving her point, Jim Marston, head of the state chapter of Environmental Defense, bemoaned the death of the solar bill thusly: "We are going to lose a bunch of jobs to other states. We are going to lose all those installation jobs, the kind of jobs that cannot be exported to China and India. And we're not going to get the clean-air benefit."

"This was simply bad luck," says Steve Taylor, a member of the Solar Alliance and executive with Applied Material Inc. "Circumstances and procedural motions." He said solar boosters will meet soon to discuss ways forward, pointing out that the bill passed the state senate on a 26-4 vote.

The \$500 million would have been funded by a statewide charge of electricity bills.