



REP. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

BUDGET COMMITTEE

MEMBERS' DAY TESTIMONY

MARCH 11, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Spratt, for hearing from me today. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

I know that this will be an exceptionally difficult budget cycle. Many Americans are feeling the negative effects of the current economic crisis and this is resulting in a flurry of activity as a wide variety of interests compete for federal resources.

However, I believe that this crisis has opened a door of opportunity. It has given us a compelling reason to pause for a moment to assess where we are going, where we really *want* to go, and how we are going to get there.

At home in Southern Arizona, folks feel it is time to stop making excuses. They are looking to us for leadership and want us to reject distractions that have kept us from focusing on what we need to do *today* to secure our future. The good news is that there are things that we can do that will help us not just weather today's storm, but lay a foundation for a brighter tomorrow.

In particular, I believe that by making critical investments in clean energy, especially solar energy, we can take a big step toward putting our nation back on a strong economic footing and a higher quality of life. Far from being a distraction from

today's economic problems, solar and other renewables provide a means of addressing the economic crisis head on.

I have heard some colleagues in Congress say it is impossible for solar and other renewable energy technologies to make a significant contribution to our energy challenges, that solar, wind, and biomass will never be more than niche players in our energy mix. With all due respect, these colleagues have been misinformed. Solar and other renewables can actually contribute *significantly* to meeting our energy needs. Indeed, renewable power sources provided over 50 percent of our nation's incremental energy in 2008.

But more than that, a robust solar industry is an economic engine that will help revive our struggling economy. Solar power creates jobs for electricians, construction workers, plumbers, line workers, roofers, engineers and high-paying manufacturing positions. With effective national policy, solar can create tens of thousands of jobs across the entire country and spur billions of dollars in economic growth and tax revenue.

Solar technologies are already being manufactured or installed in every corner of America, from Oregon in the soggy northwest to Florida in the sunny southeast, from the deserts of Arizona to the heartland of Ohio. Solar is good for our entire nation. Here are just a few examples:

- In Alamosa Colorado, Sun Edison recently built an 8.2 MW solar farm. In the process, they re-trained over 40 workers in the region, some of whom were recently laid off from the mining industry.

- Leading national businesses such as Wal-Mart, Costco, Kohls, Staples, Target, Macy's and others have all made significant commitments to installing solar energy on their own rooftops, alleviating electricity congestion in their neighborhoods.
- In the Arizona Desert, Arizona Public Service and Abengoa are planning to build the Solana project, one of the largest solar power plants in the world. When complete, it will be able to power 70,000 homes.
- On Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, the Air Force has installed a 14 MW solar array, reducing their long-term energy costs while increasing the energy security of the base. This last example illustrates one of my favorite issues: renewable energy adoption by our armed services. I am pleased that the military is taking the lead on many renewable energy technologies, and I believe they should be doing even more.

According to the Solar Energy Industries Association, solar installations in 2007 increased by more than 40 percent over 2006. In the process, solar energy companies created 6,000 new jobs, 265 megawatts of generation capacity and pumped more than \$2 billion of investment in the U.S. economy. And we have just scratched the surface of the economic potential.

Solar energy is versatile: it can be used to heat water or generate electricity, provide heating and cooling, and of course lighting. Solar can be deployed on individual homes and businesses, or it can be developed on a utility scale to serve entire cities. In places with limited transmission infrastructure, people are embracing solar as the most viable option. It provides clean,

long-term source of power that will continue to shine for millennia.

Solar technologies are rapidly becoming cost competitive with traditional sources of power. Most solar experts estimate that solar technologies will reach “grid parity” around 2012. But to get from here to there, solar needs our support today. I urge you to develop a Fiscal Year 2010 budget that will continue to level the playing field for solar and other clean energy technologies.

During the presidential campaign, then-Senator Obama promised to invest \$15 billion per year over the next ten years in developing clean, renewable energy technologies. In his FY2010 budget proposal, President Obama has again called for investment in renewables.

I urge the committee to follow the President’s lead and set aside significant funding for research and development, demonstration projects, loan guarantees and tax-free bonding authority for solar and other renewable projects. In addition, I urge the committee to provide the means for the federal government to install 2000 megawatts of solar on federal buildings by the end of 2010.

Our nation faces grave challenges in the years ahead, but there are solutions. But those solutions will require us to embrace new ways of doing things – the old ways will no longer suffice. Solar power a new way of doing things, but its benefits are proven and real. I urge the committee to give solar its full support in developing the FY2010 budget.

Thank you for your attention.