



Guest opinion: Private and public sectors must work together to power profound changes

GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

July 21, 2007

U.S. dependence on foreign oil affects our foreign policy, homeland security and military calculations in the Middle East.

It also perpetuates our use of carbon fuel and increases our emissions of toxins into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

Hundreds of the world's top scientists recently issued a sobering assessment of our planet's health. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated that the Earth's temperature is rising at a dangerous pace and that humans are largely to blame for this crisis.

Sooner or later, climate change will touch our entire way of life: our economy, health, recreation and environment in the American West.

Ending America's dependence on foreign oil and investing in clean, renewable energy, such as solar, is the Apollo mission of our generation and southern Arizona is taking on the challenge.

More and more solar energy projects are emerging in the Tucson area.

Davidson School, in cooperation with Tucson Electric Power Co., has installed a solar energy system.

The city of Tucson recently was awarded a grant to hire a full-time solar coordinator, Vice Mayor Shirley Scott's office has a solar energy system and a large solar array will soon be operational at the Thornydale Reclaimed Water Reservoir.

And every day more solar panels are being placed on public buildings, private homes and entire developments such as Civano and John Wesley Miller's Armory Park del Sol.

These are great signs of progress - but as a member of the House Science and Technology Committee, I have learned that climate change may be more far-reaching in its impacts than ever considered.

We must think big and move faster toward solutions. Imagine our Sonoran Desert as the engine of solar power for the West - an example to the world of how nature can be harnessed without being destroyed. Imagine our homes and workplaces fueled by sun power.

It can be done. And I believe that achieving success calls upon not only our creativity and perseverance, but also our ability to collaborate with new partners.

Working with my newly formed Solar Energy Advisory Council, I introduced The Solar Energy Research and Advancement Act of 2007 that will promote solar energy through a work force development initiative and a dedicated research program.

Ongoing work with this incredible cross-section of experts in the region will guide my efforts to support both private- and public-sector solar energy initiatives.

New solar companies are opening offices here and need to be welcomed. SOLON AG, one of Germany's premier solar panel manufacturers, soon will be expanding its operations in Tucson. And Prism Solar Technologies, based in New York, recently opened a development center here.

They are joining a small but growing solar industry in the region, currently led by Global Solar Energy Inc., a Tucson manufacturer of solar technology.

Big ideas often emerge from superb academic thinking. I am honored that several representatives of the University of Arizona are members of my Solar Energy Advisory Council.

The university has cutting-edge research projects under way, including an optical solar concentrator being developed at the school's Mirror Lab. These projects must be encouraged.

The wonders of our free- market economy - science, engineering and innovation - must come together if we are to solve the growing threat of climate change. Our goal is to create a brighter quality of life that is more dependent on the sun than on foreign oil.

Gabrielle Giffords is a Democratic member of the U.S. House representing Tucson and parts of southern Arizona.