Update law to ensure solar power future

Demand for solar from homeowners and businesses in Washington state has skyrocketed over the last decade. Thanks to lower material costs, increased competition among installers and manufacturers, and state and federal incentives, the solar industry has burgeoned. This has resulted in more solar jobs, more business startups, and more energy choices for consumers.

Now momentum for a renewable energy choice for consumers could be slowed, even stopped. State production incentives that bring down the cost of solar within reach for more people are slated to end in 2020. Reality, the current program is already reaching the end of its effective life.

Utility companies, governments and the solar industry have been working together to support a diversified portfolio of energy sources for future generations. But retirement of the current incentive program doesn't support the growing demand of consumers for a solar alternative or the long-term stability of the solar sector.

We’re facing a solar cliff. It is imperative that a new incentive program be adopted during the short legislative session in 2016.

Renewable energy is an economic issue as much as an environmental one. We can invest now or later, but the need for a diversified portfolio of energy sources for the future is inevitable. State incentive dollars, coupled with a federal tax credit, make solar cost competitive in the energy market.

Unlike other energy subsidies that go to corporations, Washington’s solar production incentives return to the home and business owners who have purchased solar systems. Additionally, the Washington solar industry puts significant money into local economies throughout the state by creating family-wage jobs and purchasing from local suppliers.

Solar Installers of Washington, a trade association, is spearheading legislation to ensure solar’s continued availability. Local utilities, manufacturers and environmental advocacy organizations are working together in this effort. The primary goal is to rebalance the incentive system to increase funding for solar projects by reducing the overall incentive rate paid to each new solar customer. Of equal importance will be to increase access for commercial customers, expand popular community solar opportunities, increase program transparency and streamline program administration.

Given recent improvements in solar costs and efficiencies, it is time to reassess the outdated incentive structure currently in place. Updating the solar incentive program will maximize the amount of solar deployment per state dollar, ensure availability of this popular renewable energy source and support a robust competitive marketplace for the industry that will benefit consumers.

Washington state innovators have been breaking ground in fields from biotech and aerospace to software to biotech and we have the opportunity to continue this pioneering spirit in the solar industry as well.