

## Solar Energy: The Right Way

By **Nick Patsouras** / Sunday, January 11, 2009

For more than three years and more recently as President of the Department of Water and Power Board of Commissioners, I fought to end waste, inefficiency and contracting abuses in the city-owned utility and sought to create a Ratepayer Advocate to protect the public in the future.

Now we're being asked to give a blank check to the DWP and City Hall to spend billions of dollars on the nation's largest solar energy initiative ever -- **a proposal that has no planning, no financial analysis, no engineering study.**

Approval of Measure B on the March 3 ballot would be a costly mistake. It will cost ratepayers dearly, set back hopes for reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and provide the special interests and politicians with a license to steal.

I resigned from the DWP Commission in October right after this measure was introduced without even being brought to the DWP board, right after my efforts to bring transparency and accountability by creating the Ratepayer Advocate were brushed aside.

From my experience as an engineer, businessman and 30 years as a watchdog on government spending, I can tell you as a fact the **DWP isn't up to the job managing a solar energy this big and this important.**

As things stand, the DWP just doesn't have the managerial skill and experience to handle a \$3.6 billion solar initiative that's supposed to deliver within five years, more than 30 times as much solar energy as the DWP has been able to deliver in the last 12 years.

Despite its high wages and benefits, the DWP has a very hard time recruiting and keeping workers and maintaining existing water and power facilities. Its management and staff are already overburdened trying to fulfill the Department's commitment to complete a multi-billion dollar investment to bring those facilities up to date.

Just 11 months ago, DWP management felt the best it could do was manage a program to add 20 megawatts of rooftop solar energy to government buildings. Now, it is being asked to own, install and maintain a 400 megawatt system on commercial and industrial buildings as well plus oversee a public/private solar energy program twice as big.

If past performance is any measure of future success, DWP isn't up to the task of handling this much money. A wind farm in Utah was financed by Lehman Bros., the failed investment firm, and now DWP faces losing that project as part of its renewable energy portfolio or being hit with big cost increases.

**Measure B is a blueprint for disaster and the public will get the bill.** Let's go back to the drawing board and come up with a renewable energy plan that makes fiscal sense and common sense, that protects ratepayers from catastrophic increases in their bills and delivers what we all want: A renewable energy program that we can afford, that is well planned and managed and makes Los Angeles the center of a thriving clean energy industry.