

Community Comment  
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### One roll of government

This has been an exciting week around our 1888 Victorian. Since I taught one of the first classes at HSU in appropriate technology, I've been interested in the idea of electricity from the sun. I remember first thinking about this during my first college course in botany. The way plants convert sunlight to useable energy thru the process we call photosynthesis was a revelation to me. I remembered this from boy scout days and middle and high school classes, but in college a professor said scientists were working on a way to turn the sun's energy into electricity. As I moved through my first major in college, more mention was made of making the electricity from solar panels and having storage batteries on board space craft.

In the early seventies, solar on a home was preheating water to decrease the amount of energy needed to get to the right temperature for home use. On the right day, no heating would even be needed. But the photo cells required for converting sunlight to electricity were simply too expensive. Now, even though the panels are expensive and not affordable by everyone, the price has fallen enough for us to consider this for our home and small business. Instead of decades to pay off, we can now see a pay off in years. And, as with many things that we spend our income on, some decisions are made on personal priorities and desires.

We have decided to place the solar panels on our garage which is behind the Victorian. We did this to not have modern panels on the roof of a house that is 126 years old. We know we would need a new roof on the garage since it is over 30 years old and a new electrical service panel would also be a good idea. It was modernized in the 60's and parts are hard to find. The next step is to get the appropriate permits.

This is where we get to the role of government. I was <sup>in</sup> surprised <sup>that</sup> the cost of the system is a stretch for most of us. But it's a step towards using fossil fuels for our energy needs. All regulatory agencies can make a difference in encouraging the public to do our part implementing projects that are in the public good. We could even encourage things that are made locally or at least in America.

I was surprised to read in the Chronicle last Tuesday that Governor Brown vetoed a bill that would have required businesses across the state to install baby-changing stations in both men's and women's restrooms. While I am all for this happening, I agreed with the governor with his reasoning for the veto. He said "At a time when so many have raised concerns about the number of regulations in California, I believe it would be more prudent to leave the matter of diaper-changing stations to the private sector".

This specific issue may not be the one to start on but I think the individual assembly member or senator should be the one to consider if new regulation is the best government response.

Regulations have worked to improve everyone's quality of life. But we need to be smart about what we require and what we encourage by law and what we can encourage by education and public pressure. We need smart laws, not just more laws.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.