

Opinion: California's rich soak up solar subsidies

By Dan Morain, Sacramento Bee

The sun shines on the beachfront mansions of Malibu and La Jolla, just as it does on Compton and Barrio Logan in San Diego.

It beams down on the most upscale part of Clovis and its golf course development of Brighton Crest, and on the gritty flats of south and west Fresno.

But based on how California policymakers dole out valuable subsidies for solar panels placed on the residential roofs, the poorest parts of our sunny state might as well be on the dark side of the moon.

California is in the midst of by far the nation's most ambitious program to convert to solar energy, one that began in 2006 when then Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger declared that during the next decade, the state would place solar panels on a million rooftops.

To pay for it, the California Public Utilities Commission earmarked \$3.3 billion, spread over 10 years, taken in small slices from utility customers' monthly bills.

It was high concept, bold and visionary, and not the least bit efficient. There is no more costly solar power than that which is placed on residential roofs.

"Socially, it is a complete money loser," said professor Severin Borenstein of the UC Energy Institute at UC Berkeley.

The Public Utilities Commission reported earlier this year that California Solar Initiative subsidies have amounted to \$885 million so far. They've created 924 megawatts of power

spread across 94,900 locations owned by large and small commercial users, and residential customers.

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