

Reject APS rooftop solar proposal, but for right reason

ROBERT ROBBRobert Robb, columnist | azcentral.com 11:12 a.m. MST August 6, 2014

(Photo: Michael Schennum Michael Schennum / The Republic)

APS is proposing to pay to put solar panels on rooftops. The current rooftop solar industry is calling foul, claiming unfair competition.

The Arizona Corporation Commission should reject the proposal, but not for that reason.

The rooftop incumbents offer customers the ability to generate their own electricity. That provides partial liberation from the monopoly provider. It also provides a hedge against rising electricity rates in the future, a selling point that will likely become increasingly attractive with time.

APS isn't offering anyone the ability to generate their own electricity. Instead, APS just wants to lease space on roofs for the panels. APS will own all the electricity generated. Those with APS solar panels on their roofs will still be completely captive ratepayers to the monopoly provider.

APS has proposed this rooftop option as an alternative to building another utility-scale solar generating plant. In terms of competition, generating the power from leased rooftops is no different than generating it from a power plant.

The commission shouldn't reject the APS proposal because it offers unfair competition to rooftop solar incumbents. It doesn't and protecting the distributed energy industry isn't the commission's job anyway.

Its job is to protect captive ratepayers, and that's why the commission should reject the APS proposal. It would additionally saddle captive ratepayers with higher-than-necessary electricity costs.

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