

# Solar Power 09

## International Conference & Expo

### - Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Keynote Speaker

by Sheila Cedervall, LEED AP

Despite global financial uncertainty, one segment of the economy is experiencing unprecedented growth - the solar power industry. More than 22,000 attendees from around the globe convened in Anaheim last week to attend Solar Power International 09, North America's largest business-to-business solar exposition. The conference, October 27-29 organized by SEPA, the Solar Electric and Power Association and SEIA, the Solar Energy Industries Association, featured 65 educational sessions, two hundred speakers, and more than nine hundred exhibition booths.

Keynote speaker Robert F. Kennedy Junior described his involvement in green technology as "the most subversive activity I've ever undertaken." In his speech,

titled "Green Gold Rush: A Vision for Energy Independence, Jobs, and National Wealth", he compared carbon based energy systems resulting in environmental injury to uncontrolled deficit spending, touting the creation of a national power grid based on solar, wind, and geothermal energy.

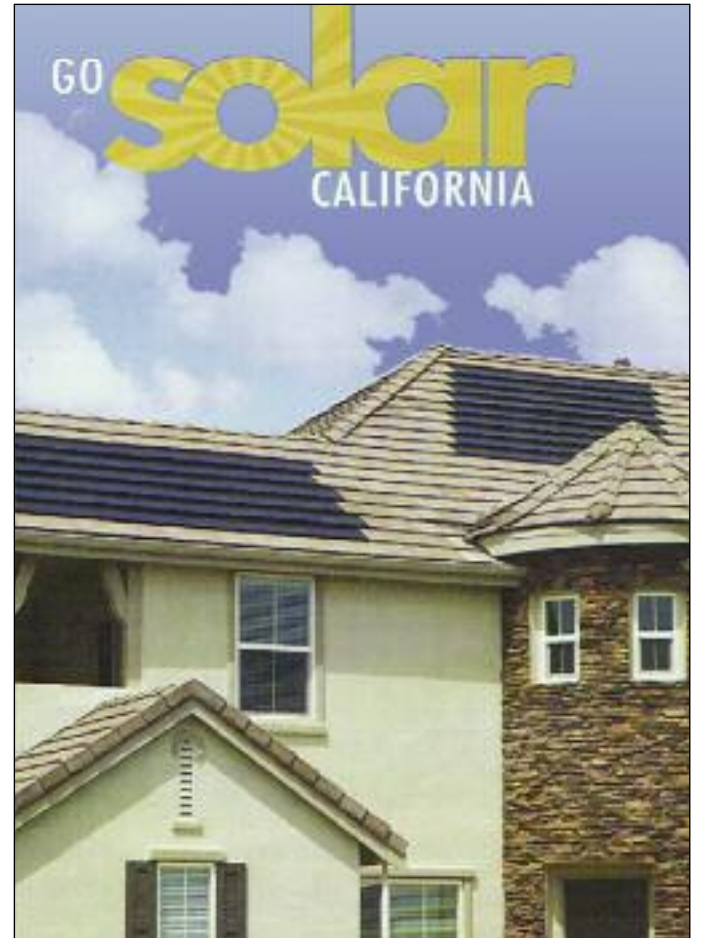
Kennedy said "Every nation that has de-carbonized its energy grid has experienced instantaneous economic growth." He praised California for holding energy use constant since 1985, during which time 85% growth in population occurred. Closing with a call to activism, he said Washington, DC has no idea that such a powerful political force existed as the 22,000 gathered in Anaheim and the solar industry should begin to "flex its muscles" in the national political arena, adding "it's better to change your politicians than change your light bulbs."

Local green marketing consultant Dix Henneke found hope in Kennedy's address, and said "It was hugely reassuring

for me to know that the current administration's policy makers and their advisors clearly understand the gravity of climate crisis. Strategies are being implemented to move us toward a true free market economy that minimizes waste and pollution and provides for a cleaner healthier world and a more secure future." Henneke particularly enjoyed hearing that as of last year more people are employed in the wind industry in the US than in the coal industry, and more renewable energy generation was added to the grid than oil, coal, and gas combined.

One exhibitor leading the way in technological advances is SMA, a German manufacturer of solar inverters, devices that

convert direct current (DC) produced by solar panels into alternating current (AC) used by homes and the electrical grid. New ventures for SMA are micro-inverters



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which convert electricity on a panel by panel basis, and high frequency inverters that fit between wall studs in new home construction.

San Clemente solar company Candalaria Electric sent electrical journeyman Cody Madden to an SMA professional training session to learn the latest inverter

installation practices. "I was surprised to see SMA was using the system for the original Bob's Big Boy in Glendale as a teaching example, a project I installed," said Madden, who found he was the only experienced installer in the class. SMA is planning to open its first factory outside Germany next year, moving 25% of its current operation to Denver, Colorado in anticipation of the growing US market.

Fueling this growth is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which provides a 30% federal tax credit to solar power systems until 2016 with no maximum cap. Combined with California Solar Initiative (CSI) rebates, incentives typically cover 45 - 50% of the cost. A tiered system of steadily declining rewards, San Diego Gas and Electric moved into the sixth CSI rebate level last month, at \$1.10 per watt (\$5,500 average per home), while Southern California Edison is in the fourth level at \$1.90 a watt (\$9,500 average). When power allotted for all ten tiers has been reserved, the CSI incentives will be discontinued.

SEIA reports an 80% increase in the volume of new solar power installed in the US in 2008 over 2007, and the industry is poised for large scale continued growth through 2010 and 2011 - good news to those who attended Solar Power 2009, as well as a bright spot of the national economy.



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