

Opinion: Our electricity is greener than you know

By Bonnie Turnbull

As you read this on an electronic device, think of it this way. **Every** fourth word you **read**, is powered by **solar** energy.

On Tuesday, our community pledged to 100 percent clean energy.

On Wednesday, Liberty Utilities celebrated the completion of the 50 MW Luning Solar Energy Center.



Liberty celebrates its new solar plant on April 19.
Photo/Bonnie Turnbull

Twenty-five percent of Liberty Utilities' electricity—25 percent of the electricity that's powering your home right now—comes from this clean energy produced three hours away.



Solar is becoming a large part of Liberty's portfolio.
Photo/Bonnie Turnbull

At night the solar panels are "parked" horizontally, but at sunrise 350 acres of panels tip toward the rising sun and follow its pathway across the sky.



Hydraulic pistons adjust banks of panels about every five minutes. Photo/Bonnie Turnbull

The Energy Center is on BLM land outside Luning near Hawthorne. You'll find it on Google Earth at the junction of highways 95 and 361. The adjacent Table Mountain substation provides an immediate and cheap connection to the grid.



Nevada is becoming a leader in solar. Photo/Bonnie Turnbull

The center is about a mile long by about half a mile wide, but it almost disappears into the desert.

How much will this clean energy cost us?

For the next five years, customers will pay down the cost of construction, so the charge will be about 6 cents per kWh. Currently, electricity generated by natural gas costs about 4-5 cents per kWh. But with solar's cheap operational expenses, our kilowatt hour costs will drop below those from natural gas for the next 25 years.



Travis Johnson, Liberty's vice president for operations, talks about the solar project. Photo/Bonnie Turnbull

Many U.S. jobs were created during the construction. However, most parts were manufactured overseas—the panels in China and the power converters in Germany—in countries well-positioned to benefit from this energy transformation.

With our commitment to clean energy, we help foster the economic climate here in the United States for more investment in the green energy sector.

Bonnie Turnbull is a resident of South Lake Tahoe and member of Tahoe Climate Change Action Network.