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Trade war with China could claim U.S. solar industry jobs as a casualty

Cutting off China and threatening U.S. solar jobs started in October when a German company with a manufacturing facility in Oregon filed a trade complaint with the U.S. International Trade Commission and the Department of Commerce demanding that punitive tariffs be imposed on solar panels and cells imported from China. Just before New Year's Day, several U.S. manufacturers filed a similar petition against China and Vietnam seeking special surcharges on wind towers imported from these countries.

Now that the first shots have been fired, there's a growing danger that China will retaliate. Already, China is considering asking the World Trade Organization to investigate alleged unfair practices in U.S. clean energy policies, including programs in Washington, California, New Jersey, Ohio and Massachusetts.

If these frictions ignite a full-scale trade war, our country's casualties could include eliminating many of 100,000-plus good-paying jobs (which have been expected to grow to almost 124,000 at the end of 2012), delaying dozens of solar energy projects, raising prices for consumers, reducing our energy security, and reversing the progress of an industry that is running an all-too-rare trade surplus with the rest of the world, including China.

For all the sound and fury, low prices for solar panels and cells aren't the problem, and protectionism isn't the solution. Several decades of private investment, public support and scientific progress are bearing fruit for a U.S. solar energy industry that now can generate electricity with costs, in some markets, that are competitive with power produced from fossil fuels.

At a time when the growth rate in the entire economy is a sluggish 0.7 percent, the U.S. solar industry, now numbering almost 5,000 companies, is expanding at a rate of 6.8 percent a year. Since 2009, the sector has doubled its workforce, providing more than 100,000 high-skilled, high-wage jobs, including installers, technicians and professionals in scientific research, finance and allied services.

Most U.S. solar energy jobs are in designing, engineering, installing, maintaining and selling solar energy systems, not in manufacturing solar panels and cells. Low prices for these products -- which are manufactured in the United States and in Germany and Japan, as well as in China -- are promoting the industry's progress and growth. From 2008 through 2011, the 50 percent reduction in the prices for solar panels encouraged an 800 percent increase in the market for solar energy systems.

Electricity Pricing Areas - Jan 17, 2012 February

On-Peak	Per kWh
Cinergy	\$.03140
PJM West	\$.03882

ComEd Average Day Ahead LMP Electric Price

Time Period	Average per Kwh
Jan 1 -Jan 31, 2011	\$.03871
Feb 1 - Feb 28	\$.03581
March 1- Mar 31	\$.03668
April 1 - April 30	\$.03448
May1- May 31	\$.03954
June 1 - June 30	\$.03851
July 1 thru July 31	\$.05170
Aug 1 - Aug 31	\$.04064
Sep 1 - Sep 30	\$.03058
Oct 1- Oct31	\$.02968
Nov 1- Nov 30	\$.02816
Dec 1 - Dec 31	\$.02971
Jan 1 -Jan 16, 2012	\$.03099

Weather Today: Rain and snow this morning with snow showers for the afternoon. Morning high of 40F with temps falling to near freezing. Winds NW at 20 to 30 mph. Chance of rain 80%.
Tonight: Partly cloudy skies. Low near 15F. Winds NW at 15 to 25 mph. **Wed** Sunshine and clouds mixed. High 28F. Winds SSW at 10 to 20 mph. **Thu:** Windy, chance of snow showers in the morning. Highs in the low 20s and lows in the low teens. **Fri:** Chance of a few snow showers. Highs in the upper 20s and lows in the low 20s. **Sat:** Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 30s and lows in the low 30s.

