

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Texas Solar Advocates Hope for Legislative Boost

by [Kate Galbraith](#) | 15 minutes ago

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credit: Wayne National Forest

Advocates of solar power are urging passage of a [bill](#) that would add a dollar per month to homeowners' electric bills to fund solar projects.

The House State Affairs Committee heard testimony on the bill late last night. Its sponsor, state Rep. [Drew Darby](#), R-San Angelo, told the committee that solar was a good complement for Texas' existing energy resources, and that its costs had [dropped dramatically in recent years](#).

"Texas should be a leader in building the domestic solar industry," he said. Solar installations could make use of

the new [transmission lines being built to aid wind power](#), he said.

Texas, although the national leader in wind power, lags far behind many states, and especially California, in solar.

Opponents of the bill warned of the still-high cost of solar. Ryan Brannan, a policy analyst with the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, said that the bill could end up costing the state's taxpayers about \$240 million — not including administrative fees.

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"If California is leading the way in this, we'll let them have it and we'll keep taking their citizens and their business," he said.

The Texas Association of Manufacturers also opposes the bill due to costs.

The bill would add a \$1 per month charge to home electric bills. It would also add \$5 per month to the bill for a company meter, and \$50 a month for each industrial meter (some manufacturers will have multiple meters, so the bill establishes a limit of \$250 a month for a "single industrial account"). This was not even a "rounding error" for manufacturers, Darby said. Individuals and small companies will be able to opt out of the fee.

An array of solar companies showed up to praise the bill, which is seen as the greatest hope of the solar industry, which came close to getting an incentive bill passed last session but ultimately [fell short](#).

Not all lawmakers were present, given the late hour. The committee chairman, [Byron Cook](#), R-Austin, expressed some concerns on the costs of the bill. "I don't really want to explain to my mother why she's

got another dollar on her bill," he said. Some of the solar companies reiterated that costs have dropped significantly.

State Rep. [Dan Huberty](#), R-Houston — whose background is in natural gas — challenged the Texas Public Policy Foundation, saying, "Don't we create jobs by doing this too?" The bill, he said, could help Texas to "become an energy independent state."

Representatives of Wal-Mart and the Texas Association of Builders expressed support for the bill.

The program would last five years, after which time, its backers say, solar costs could well reach grid parity.

In the Senate, solar bills under consideration include one by State Sen. Troy Fraser, R-Horseshoe Bay, which would [create a solar rebate program](#).