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SENATE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES LEGISLATION ENCOURAGING ENERGY SAVING IMPROVEMENTS FOR BUSINESSES AND HOMEOWNERS

PALM DESERT, CA – Today in Sacramento, the California Senate voted 29 to 5 in favor of Assembly Bill 811. The legislation would allow cities and counties in California to make low interest loans to local homeowners and business owners for the installation of solar panels and other permanent energy efficiency improvements. Participating homeowners and business owners would be allowed to repay the loans over time as part of their property tax bills. Assembly Bill 811 now returns for a final vote to the state Assembly, where it was approved by a vote of 57 to 13 on January 29, before going to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose signature would make it law.

The up-front costs associated with installing solar panels, upgrading to a high efficiency air conditioning and heating system, and making other energy efficiency improvements can be prohibitive. Assembly Bill 811 is intended to ease the financial impact of these worthwhile investments by allowing cities and counties to help finance them at low interest rates with repayment over time. The legislation aims to make solar power systems and energy efficiency upgrades more affordable for residents and businesses, thereby reducing energy demand, expanding power generation from renewable sources, and decreasing energy costs throughout California.

Conceived as part of the City of Palm Desert's efforts to reduce energy consumption and demand in the community by 30 percent over five years, Assembly Bill 811 was authored by 40th District Assemblyman Lloyd E. Levine. The bill is supported by the cities of Burbank, Concord, El Monte, Fort Bragg, Los Angeles, San Marcos, the County of Riverside, California Contract Cities Association, California Public Utilities Commission, Environment California, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Sonoma County Water Agency, Breathe California, Clean Power Campaign, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Sempra Energy, Solar Alliance, and Southern California Edison.

Pat Conlon, director of Palm Desert's Office of Energy Management, said the biggest hurdle to efforts to encourage homeowners and business owners to invest in energy efficiency improvements is that many of them cannot afford the initial capital cost of a new air conditioner or solar power system.

"Today's Senate vote shows bipartisan support for the loan program, which when finalized, will address that issue," Conlon said. "It is very encouraging."

For more information, please call the Palm Desert Office of Energy Management at 760-837-0287.

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