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Renewal energy, such as the solar power generated by Dr. Tito Norris' photovoltaic roof system, is one of what are called the four pillars of a new economic model and era of prosperity.

Leading a new revolution?

In 1920, San Antonio was the largest city in Texas but by 1930 had slipped to a distant third.

At a crucial moment, San Antonio's leaders made a fateful miscalculation. They bet our future on tourism, military bases and cheap labor instead of manufacturing and energy-related industries.

Ninety years later, San Antonio has arrived at another crucial moment, with a chance to get ahead of history.

For two days last week, leaders from CPS Energy and the city sat down with Jeremy Rifkin, an economist who advises the European Union, and a team of global leaders from IBM, General Electric and other companies to talk about how to transform San Antonio from a poor city to a new green energy capital with a high-tech sustainable economy.

Or, as Aurora Geis, chairwoman of the board of CPS Energy, put it: "We have a chance now to put San Antonio on the map globally."

The issue is how to become the first city in the U.S. to become a mayor player in what Rifkin



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calls the Third Industrial Revolution. The revolution — happening now — is moving from a depleted economic system powered by fossil-fuel generating plants that transmit energy from a centralized grid to a thriving economy driven by renewable sources of energy, primarily solar and wind.

If San Antonio builds our economy around what Rifkin calls the "four pillars" — renewable energies, buildings as positive power plants, hydrogen storage, and the promotion of smart grids and plug-in vehicles — then in 2020 when the names are called of the cities that ushered in a new era of prosperity, San Antonio will be at the top of the list.

"The four pillars are the future," said Mayor Phil Hardberger, who initiated the conference.

"The old way is death. The new way is life. We are beginning a voyage as a city. I don't know the answer to every question we face, but I do know the necessity of taking the voyage."

Some of those questions are how San Antonians, who are used to paying among the lowest electricity rates in the country, can find the money and political will to make large investments in solar, wind and the transition from a centralized power generation model to a distributed model.

CPS Energy officials at the conference said that the utility can't bear the burden of large-scale costs and will need subsidies from federal and state governments.

Rifkin said public/private financing arrangements and incentives can pay for much of the cost of conversion. Programs such as California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's "Million Solar Roofs" program on residential and commercial properties have created many jobs and last year added 160 megawatts of roof-top solar power.

In many respects, CPS

Energy is well-positioned for the change. It's made a large investment in wind and has plans in place to save 1,200 megawatts of energy by 2020 through efficiency. Under Geis' leadership, the board has already adopted one of the pillars — a commitment to move from a centralized to a distributed model.

The question is whether CPS Energy can lead the city into the Third Industrial Revolution by moving ahead with its commitment to nuclear power.

Nuclear is what Rifkin describes as a "sunsetting source of conventional power" — in other words, it belongs to an older age. On the other hand, the cost of "sunrising" sources — such as the sun itself, wind and geothermal sources — aren't yet competitive.

Soon, city leaders will be faced with the kind of decision leaders faced in the 1920s. Do we stay with the status quo or do we bet on green jobs and power our future with renewables? Put another way: Sunrise or sunset in San Antonio?

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