CRYSTALLINE SILICON PHOTOVOLTAIC CELLS (WHETHER OR NOT PARTIALLY OR FULLY ASSEMBLED INTO OTHER PRODUCTS)
Investigation No. TA-201-75
HEARING

TESTIMONY OF SHANE MESSER

Good morning. I am Shane Messer, Vice President of Sales and Marketing of SolarWorld Americas Inc. I have served in this capacity since 2016, but have worked in the solar industry for more than a decade. Given my background, I will focus my comments on SolarWorld's commitment to producing the highest quality products at the most competitive prices, and its record of high customer satisfaction. I will also discuss how imports – and not any other alleged alternative causes – are responsible for the harm to our industry over the past five years.

SolarWorld is widely recognized as America's solar leader. While other companies build overseas, SolarWorld carries out the manufacturing process right here at home — from sourcing and manufacturing to assembling and hiring. We source only the highest-quality components and materials, from reputable and proven suppliers.

Because of this commitment to excellence, our solar panels — and our operations – consistently meet or exceed the most stringent performance and environmental standards. SolarWorld was one of only several global solar producers to be recently named a "Top Performer" in the DNV GL's 2017 PV Module Reliability Scorecard Report. This recognition by the world's largest classification society is only given to solar producers with the highest PV module quality and long-term reliability.

Our warranty rate is so low as to be negligible. Last year, for example, we shipped nearly 3 million modules. Of those modules, merely 0.01 percent were rejected. In fact, at no point in the last five years has SolarWorld's rejection rate exceeded .01 percent. (For comparison's sake, many Chinese companies carry warranty reserves on 1% of all sales.) It takes gall, to say the least, for anyone to claim that SolarWorld produces a poor product.

Similarly, there is no merit to a claim that SolarWorld has poor customer service or marketing. In fact, this is one of our strengths. SolarWorld works with nearly 5,000 U.S. solar installers across the country. Of those, 349 are authorized installers and 36 are platinum installers. These installers work with SolarWorld because we are committed to excellence in everything that we do, from product quality, to customer service, to prices.

Because of this commitment, SolarWorld's list of awards and accolades is extensive. In June 2016, a comprehensive survey by independent research firm EuPD Research found that more U.S. solar-system installers choose to carry SolarWorld solar panels than those of any other brand. SolarWorld has earned an A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau, its top ranking, which demonstrates that SolarWorld's customer service department in Oregon is second to none. How can anyone reasonably claim that SolarWorld has suffered severe financial losses and layoffs because of poor customer service or quality. Clearly, this is not the case.

Before I joined SolarWorld in 2016, I worked at SunPower and then Bosch until they ceased their solar operations due to unfairly traded imports. I then joined SunEdison. I tell you this for two reasons. First, I have seen firsthand how quickly imports can come in and destroy U.S. market share, companies, and jobs. Second, I wouldn't have joined SolarWorld if it provided substandard merchandise and service. The opposite is true - I came to SolarWorld because I knew it was the best.

Our competitors also falsely claim that the domestic industry is unable to supply the 72-cell utility sector. The Commission has rejected these claims in the past and should do so again. SolarWorld produces 72 cell modules and would be producing even more if not for surging solar cell and module imports. In fact, SolarWorld added a brand new 72-cell line in 2016 in order to serve growing demand in the utility sector. However, this line, like many of SolarWorld's other investments, never got a chance to succeed. Our investment was immediately undercut when imports rapidly accelerated into the U.S. market last year.

Similarly, SolarWorld's focus on monocrystalline products is not a cause of its harm. As the Commission found in the last solar investigation, purchasers often do not specify mono versus multi products in their RFPs. The Commission, therefore, rightfully found that the "record does not show that the domestic industry's product mix explains its poor performance." In fact, we see the market now moving strongly to mono and PERC products – we led, and now Asian manufacturers are following our technology roadmap.

The substantial cause of the dramatic decline in the domestic industry's condition is direct and undeniable – imports. Since 2012, the domestic industry has suffered serious injury due to a surge of solar imports in the U.S. market, including massive layoffs, closures, and severe production cutbacks. The domestic industry's condition, however, worsened as imports spiked into the U.S. market in 2016.

And, it is not only the domestic producers that are hurting – the entire U.S. supply chain is being harmed. Just last week, SolarWorld's component supplier, Ulbrich Solar Technologies Oregon, shuttered its Hillsboro plant after six years of operations, laying off 35 employees. I could give you many other examples of how our supply chain has been hollowed out by imports, further harming U.S manufacturing.

SolarWorld has experienced hard times recently and faces an urgent and dire situation without trade relief. I have seen hundreds of my colleagues laid off and it pains me to think that many more could be let go if market conditions persist.

SolarWorld is one of the most competitive solar producers in the world and, for this reason, many of our loyal customers have stuck by us. We can compete among the best, but not against surging volumes of low-priced imports. On behalf of SolarWorld and our employees, we urge you to make an affirmative finding.

Thank you.