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Guest column: Ventura County leading the way on the clean energy transition

Michelle Ellison Your Turn

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As bright holiday lights are hung, piercing the bleakness of the waning 2020, I reflect on the many things for which I'm grateful, hopeful and optimistic. Our communities are on the vanguard in responding to the climate crisis.

Ventura County, the third largest oil-producing region in California and the fastest warming region in the contiguous U.S., now leads the country on the clean energy transition with the most people (approximately 500,000 of us) sourcing our electricity from 100% renewable energy. We are achieving zero-emissions goals decades ahead of the state's target, and demonstrating that decarbonizing our electric grid is already viable and affordable.

This progress would not have been possible without the opportunity afforded by Clean Power Alliance (CPA), the community choice energy provider serving 3 million residents in 32 municipalities across Los Angeles and Ventura counties. Participating municipalities are benefiting from greater local control and the ability to fast track the transition to clean energy

To meet the high demand for clean energy, CPA is moving forward with over 1,200 megawatts (MW) of new renewable projects and 686 MW of new battery storage. These projects will create more than 2,500 construction jobs and over \$1 billion in investment. Last month, CPA approved its first local solar and battery storage installation, and with more projects on the way in our communities to build resilience, reliability and boost our economy.

Five pioneering member agencies in our county are achieving decarbonization at an unprecedented rate, as a result of their boldly choosing to enroll in 100% Green Power. Those agencies — Ojai, Oxnard, Thousand Oaks, Ventura, and the County Unincorporated — were joined by Culver City, Rolling Hills Estates, Santa Monica, South Pasadena, and West Hollywood, when CPA service launched in 2019. The reception has been so positive, with a vast majority of customers choosing to stay with Green Power and low-income residents participating at no extra cost, such that more cities are considering opting up to 100%. In fact,

we're now at 14 member agencies, with the recent decisions by Agoura Hills, Malibu, Manhattan Beach and Sierra Madre. More and larger service areas will likely join soon.

Camarillo, Moorpark and Simi Valley, the three remaining CPA member agencies in Ventura County, along with 15 more agencies in L.A. County, now have the opportunity to choose 100% Green Power, beginning in 2021. Camarillo will consider it at its council meeting on Wednesday. If cities don't act before the Feb. 1 deadline, they'll have to wait until 2022, locking in another year's worth of harmful emissions, so let your elected representatives know you want your city to be part of the solution.

In addition to the progress we are making to reduce our carbon footprint coming from electricity, there is another important step our local governments can take to eliminate gas-related emissions in our buildings. Just as we have decarbonized our electricity supply ahead of the target set by Sacramento, we can also reduce our reliance on appliances run on methane-emitting fracked gas. So far 40 municipalities across the state have adopted "reach codes" to require or incentivize electrification for new buildings, which are cheaper, healthier, safer and less polluting.

Just last month, the city of Ojai passed the first all-electric reach code in SoCal Gas territory. Ventura County's recently approved General Plan also calls for a reach code. These kinds of decisions support the necessary transition to clean energy in buildings, the second largest source of emissions behind transportation.

This year, the holiday lights in our communities sparkle with clean renewable energy, and I am grateful that our local elected officials are leading us into a carbon-free future. I hope you will support your city's steps to reduce emissions with 100% Green Power and the adoption of building electrification reach codes. In spite of the many challenges 2020 has brought, great things are happening.

Michelle Ellison serves as an Alternate Director for Ojai on the Clean Power Alliance Board, and Chair of the Ojai Climate Emergency Mobilization Committee.