

WHY ARE BIG UTILITIES SO AFRAID?

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks and Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
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Last year, Ventura and Los Angeles counties took a huge step forward in creating energy choices when we joined with dozens of local cities to create the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California. Since, 28 jurisdictions have signed on to offer cleaner, greener and cheaper energy to communities throughout Southern California. We are not the first local California governments to embrace the promise of what is known as community choice aggregation.

By the end of 2017, there were nine such groups, and by the end of 2020, it is estimated that more than 18 million Californians will get their electricity from a CCA program. The model also has a strong track record in other forward-thinking states, including Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Ohio. These programs bring more clean energy to consumers, lower utility bills and create jobs in local renewable power.

Unfortunately, big utilities are working hard to confuse the public and regulators and to make it tougher for the public to have a say over where they get their electricity. On Thursday, the California Public Utilities Commission will hear a proposal that would deliberately slow down the creation of local CCA programs.

They operate as nonprofits, allowing local governments to purchase electricity in the wholesale power market and sell it to their residents and businesses using existing transmission lines. This gives consumers an alternative to the electricity provided by big investor-owned utilities such as Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric.

Why would PG&E, SCE, and SDG&E try to stand in the way of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California and other CCAs? The answer seems clear: After operating for decades as monopoly energy suppliers, the big utilities are simply afraid of competition.

The PUC must be alert to the big utilities' motives and work with local governments to address the new challenges and opportunities that CCAs represent in California. We call on the commission and the utilities to be fair and forthright in their dealings with cities and counties that want to purchase cleaner energy and provide it at lower prices to residents and local businesses.

This is the future of California energy and the sooner we can make it happen, the better.