

The “Utility Monopoly Power Grab of 2014”

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California State Capital in Sacramento - photo by wiki/User: Coolcaesar, CC by SA 3.0, en Wikipedia

The California legislature passed AB 2145 by a 51-15 vote. A broad and diverse coalition of business, local government, community and environmental organizations have decried the California Assembly’s passage of what they are calling the ‘Utility Monopoly Power Grab of 2014.’

This fight is not over. This legislation has now proceeded to the state’s senate. However, if the senate passes AB 2145 and it is signed into law, they say it will “dangerously undermine California’s

efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to create thousands of local clean energy jobs.”

There are currently two not-for-profit community-based utility programs in California and more than a dozen more preparing to launch.

“The monopoly utilities know that Community Choice offers competition that will give customers a more attractive option which provides local economic benefits and greenhouse gas reductions. AB 2145 is designed to take this choice away from Californians,” said Ann Hancock of the Climate Protection Campaign, the non-profit organization that spearheaded the formation of the most recent Community Choice program to launch, Sonoma Clean Power.

Lane Sharman, who has spent years working to found a Community Choice energy program in San Diego, said “Current state law allows us to rapidly bring real free market competition into the electricity market, at a scale large enough to bring better prices, cleaner energy, and badly needed green jobs. But AB 2145 will completely gut our ability to do so. There will be no Community Choice program in San Diego if this bill becomes law.”

Nile Malloy of Communities for a Better Environment said, “There are underserved communities all over California waiting for these programs to begin, and directly reduce

pollutants in our neighborhoods while providing vital new jobs. Bradford's bill will pull the rug right out from under those communities, stealing away crucial new hope for a better future."

Sierra Club California representative Edward Moreno said, "Sierra Club is shocked that this bill passed through the Assembly. At a moment when it is increasingly clear that California, the nation, and the world, have precious little time to get our collective act together to prevent the worst of the Earth's looming climate crisis impacts, California Assembly members must remain in tune with that reality."



The room of the California State Assembly. Photo by David Monniaux, CC BY-SA 1.2

"Legislators are finally waking up and starting to recognize the true impact of AB 2145. It will crush emerging green jobs and community choice. It's bad for business because it squelches competition. If this bill passes, Californians will have their legislators to blame for paying higher and higher prices for dirtier power," said Woody Hastings, Renewable Energy Implementation Manager at Climate Protection Campaign.

Some believe the fact that this bill is authored by a Democrat, and sponsored by Labor groups, furthered its passage.

The Democrat, Stephen Bradford, is one of the primary recipients of PG&E's political contributions and a former executive of one of California's Southern California Edison.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Worker Local 1245, which represents about 12,000 PG&E employees, has a long history of campaigning for the utility's interests.

According to the Marin News, IBEW local 1245's Business Rep, Hunter Stern, waged a "campaign of misinformation" in support of AB 1245 and against Marin Clean Energy (MCE), the state's first CCA.

One of his alleged misrepresentations is a statement that that MCE is using electricity that is "dirtier than the power it replaced."

A spokesperson for the California Public Utilities Commission told the Marin News, "I don't know what they're referring to."

In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency chose 9 of Marin cities to be included in its list of America's cleanest for 2012.

The Marin news points out that “Currently, 50 percent of MCE’s energy comes from renewable sources, while renewable sources account for only 20 percent of PG&E’s energy.”

The county of Napa and cities of Albany and San Pablo have expressed interest in joining MCE.

So has San Francisco, whose own community choice program was blocked eleven months ago. Supervisors John Avalos, London Breed, Scott Wiener, David Campos and Eric Mar introduced a city ordinance to initiate a study of joining Marin Clean Energy.

PG&E has yet to respond to my request for a comment.

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