

PG&E ballot initiative comes under scrutiny

Rebecca Bowe: February 02, 2010 San Francisco Bay Guardian

Pacific Gas & Electric Company's statewide ballot initiative, which the utility calls The Taxpayer's Right to Vote Act, has attracted criticism in a few editorials since the company sank millions into gathering enough signatures to qualify it for the ballot.

The proposed initiative would change the state constitution to require a two-thirds majority of voters to approve new spending or implementation of municipal power programs, such as San Francisco's community choice aggregation program. The proposal drew fire from California Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and Senator Mark Leno, who warned PG&E CEO Peter Darbee in a strongly worded letter that state law prohibits utility companies from interfering with the creation of such programs.

The LA Times, The Sacramento Bee, and members of the California Legislature aren't the only ones criticizing PG&E's initiative. A new blog started by former California Energy Commissioner John Geesman, called "PG&E Ballot Initiative Factsheet," is fully dedicated to airing the dirt on PG&E's power grab. Written by a California energy insider, it recently noted that the PG&E board has voted to spend \$30 million on the initiative.

Geesman also points out that as it's written, the initiative would actually require a two-thirds majority vote before municipal electricity providers could provide service to new customers:

A close reading of Proposition 16 reveals that its largest impact -- whether intentionally or through sloppy drafting -- may be in disrupting the ordinary, day-to-day operations of existing municipal utilities which presently provide 25 - 30 % of California's electricity. ...Bottom Line: if you're a resident of Anaheim, or Burbank, or Glendale, or Pasadena, or Riverside -- not exactly socialist towns, but all served by municipal utilities -- or any of the other several dozen similarly impacted jurisdictions, your new neighbor isn't going to be getting his electricity turned on until two-thirds of the voters say so.

http://www.sfbg.com/blogs/politics/2010/02/pge_ballot_initiative_comes_un.html