

\$30 group fights PG&E over Prop 16

Mark Matthews, ABC7 tv

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In one corner you have \$35 million, a small army of political consultants, tons of television and radio advertising, and in the other corner -- nothing but ambition.

Inside a small studio apartment in Sebastopol, seven people armed only with computers and high-speed connection are trying to take down a utility giant.

Documentary film maker Ben Zolno is organizing friends to use Twitter and Facebook, any social media they can, to contact thousands of people a day and talk about why they shouldn't vote for Prop 16.

"And if you could just look up any kind of recent article from today just do a Google search for things that are from the past 24 hours then that's the kind of thing we can tweet about later, just keep the conversation going," says Zolno to one of his aids.

They're focusing on conservatives in Southern California, thinking that most of the Bay Area already knows that Prop 16 would require communities to get a two-thirds vote before being allowed to break away from PG&E and buy electricity from a competitor.

"Do we have enough tweets to last us through three o'clock?" says Zolno.

Zolno says that two-thirds majority requirement would make it nearly impossible for communities to start up their own cooperatives.

"That's just a fact and the other reason I'm doing it is because it's fun to try and take down a huge Goliath with a \$30 David," says Zolno.

Counting the pizza he bought the first day, Zolno's group has spent \$30, less than one millionth of the money that PG&E has sunk into its campaign to get Prop 16 passed.

Commercials for Prop 16 are playing in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and other cities.

"Every market across the state. I mean this is a state-wide election, we're communicating with voters from across California," says Robin Swanson, a spokesperson for the Yes On Prop 16 campaign.

Swanson won't say how much television time they are buying or how much they are willing to spend.

"I will tell you that we will spend what it takes to communicate with voters across the state of California. We'll spend what it takes to communicate to voters about their right to vote on this issue," says Swanson.

Swanson didn't want to talk about how all the money is being spent, but ABC7 does know where it is all coming from -- all \$35 million came from PG&E.

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