



June 23, 2017

Michael Picker, President
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
FAX: 415-703-1758

Dear President Picker,

At a time when we are paying other states to take our excess solar power, it's unconscionable that California would continue to build more natural gas-powered plants and that two plant operators financed the Governor's trip to Beijing to proclaim his world leadership against the damage wrought by fossil fuels.

We are deeply troubled to learn that AES Corporation, which chipped in to help pay for the Beijing trip via the California State Protocol Foundation, sent an executive to accompany the Governor. AES recently won the right to build two big new fossil fuel-powered electric plants in the Los Angeles basin for Southern California Edison despite a demonstrated electricity glut.

AES won from other regulators the right to expand that capacity beyond what the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved. Edison will need to come before you for permission to pass those extra costs along to ratepayers.

When Californians are overpaying billions of dollars for their electricity, and independent operators are shutting down their plants, it's outrageous that AES would win the right to build *new* fossil-fueled power plants and then parade around the world with the Governor as climate change champions.

We call upon the PUC to ensure full transparency by requiring disclosure of any contact between AES and Administration officials on the trip, as well as

the Governor himself, about any upcoming proposals before the PUC involving Edison and AES.

Governor Brown travelled to Beijing this month to promote his climate agenda along with a delegation of 30 state business leaders, including from AES, energy investors such as BP Ventures, and business advocacy groups such as the Bay Area Council.

The trip was underwritten by these executives who paid a fee of about \$5,500 to the California State Protocol Foundation on top of their travel costs to attend multiple private dinners, luncheons, and receptions with Brown, as well as Chinese business and political leaders. The Foundation funded the Governor's travel to Beijing with these donations.

NRG is a contributor to the same foundation, having donated \$25,000, and \$110,000 overall to the Governor's campaigns, causes and the California Democratic Party since 2012. The PUC approved Edison's contract with NRG to build a gas-fired power plant in Oxnard, but that plan now hangs in the balance as other energy regulators rethink the need for it.

As we have demonstrated in our report, *Brown's Dirty Hands*, energy companies have used campaign and charitable donations to win favors from the Administration or lawmakers or to say "Thank you." AES has donated \$20,000 to the Oakland Military Institute, one of Governor Jerry Brown's favorite causes. Edison is a major donor to Governor Brown's campaigns and the California Democratic Party, contributing more than \$1.7 million to Brown's two gubernatorial campaigns and the California Democratic Party since 2009.

Ironically, companies milking the state for unnecessary fossil fuel power paid for by ratepayers are underwriting the Governor's anti-climate change agenda and the media coverage that it drives.

While the trip presented a business opportunity to sell technology and know-how aboard, it also presented a business opportunity to influence Governor Brown and regulators such as Robert Weisenmiller of the California Energy

Commission and Mary Nichols of the Air Resources Board, to encourage utilities to buy that technology in California.

Weisenmiller and other energy commissioners recently granted AES licenses allowing the company to build 62 percent more capacity at Alamitos and 31 percent more capacity at Huntington Beach for Edison than the PUC approved last year.

Ratepayers are already saddled with these power plants, but it is only a matter of time before Edison returns to ask the PUC for permission to charge ratepayers for additional power that the plants will generate, whether it is needed or not.

AES West executive Stephen O’Kane had access to Brown and his top officials in Beijing to influence such a decision.

The Governor has intervened in such decisions in the past, according to emails produced under Public Records Act Requests. For example, Brown appears to have played an instrumental role in helping muscle PUC votes for fossil fuel projects that weren’t necessarily needed.

When Pacific Gas & Electric wanted to build the Oakley natural gas-fired power plant in Contra Costa County, one PUC Commissioner resisted. According to a January 1, 2013 email from former PG&E lobbyist Brian Cherry to his boss, Cherry described his conversation with former PUC President Michael Peevey: “He reminded me how he and Governor Brown used every ounce of persuasion to get [commissioner Mark] Ferron to change his mind and vote for Oakley...Jerry’s direct plea ...was decisive. Peevey suggested that Tony [Earley, former PG&E CEO] call the Governor personally and thank him.” An appeals court later struck down the PUC decision because PG&E could not prove the need for the plant.

The PUC’s troubled history with international back-room dealing makes disclosure of any such contacts critical, despite the fact that there are no *ex parte* rules covering the reporting of energy company conversations with other energy policy decision makers outside of the PUC. Based on this

situation, we urge legislative leaders to broaden the law governing *ex parte* communications.

Former PUC President Peevey, now under criminal investigation, cut an illegal under the table deal with Edison in Warsaw, Poland on a Hotel Bristol napkin that unjustly assigned the lion's share of billions of dollars in decommissioning costs for the defective San Onofre nuclear generators onto ratepayers instead of shareholders.

As soon as an Edison proceeding is opened, the Commission needs to ascertain from the Governor and from top regulators travelling with him whether AES lobbied on approving yet more natural gas power capacity for the LA Basin for its client, Edison.

As you know, the state requires regulators to consider increased energy efficiency, demand-side programs, and renewable energy before the construction of new fossil fuel power plants, which are to be a last resort. Instead, under your tenure as a top energy advisor to Brown and then at the PUC, 15 natural gas power plants have been approved or built.

Though electricity demand continues to fall, *The Los Angeles Times* has reported new natural gas power plants will provide a minimum of 21 percent more power than demand for it by 2020. (<http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-electricity-capacity/>)

The tab to Californians totals \$40 billion a year, nearly \$7 billion more than we were paying a decade ago. The state has authorized major investor-owned utilities to build in roughly triple the minimum extra capacity than required to meet unforeseen demand. This comes at a time when we are paying other states to take our excess solar power whose plummeting price now rivals that of natural gas power, according to *The Los Angeles Times*. (<http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-electricity-solar/>)

State regulators' approval for these plants keeps the state hooked on fossil fuels that Governor Brown purports to be battling, increases global warming and toxic emissions, and knowingly creates stranded assets at the expense of ratepayers and the environment since the plants will not be able to run for decades and still meet stringent new legal requirements for renewable energy.

All five PUC Commissioners, including yourself, are former top Brown aides or former Brown executive branch appointees. Governor Brown has enlisted the PUC in the past to represent his views to state lawmakers attempting to reform the Commission and tighten rules preventing behind-the-scenes dealings between the Commission and the energy industry. Tough new legislation was ultimately vetoed by Brown in 2015. The Governor, more closely than any other in modern history, controls the PUC with a firm grip.

With ratepayers paying billions more for electricity that that they don't need greased by PUC corruption scandals, the Governor and the PUC owe the people of California full disclosure in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liza Tucker", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Liza Tucker
Consumer Advocate

CC:

PUC Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves

PUC Commissioner Carla Peterman

PUC Commissioner Liane Randolph

PUC Commissioner Clifford Rechtschaffen

Kevin De Leon, President pro Tempore

Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly

Ben Hueso, Chair, Senate Energy, Utilities & Communications Committee

Chris Holden, Chair, Assembly Utilities & Energy Committee