

Solstice Letter:

Marin Approaches Birth of Local Clean Energy Program

We near the end of 2009 without a real deal from Copenhagen or a public option in health care, but closer to home, the baby possessing the DNA to address both types of problems is about to be born:* our very own community-based, non-profit, public option for clean, healthy, affordable energy — Marin Clean Energy (MCE).

Birth is difficult, and this one especially needs your loving attention. Our incumbent utility is furiously pulling out all the stops to smother this infant in the birth canal — and is even funding a statewide ballot measure in an attempt to bleed to death its entire family of community-controlled energy agencies — including venerable, upstanding institutions such as the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and the City of Palo Alto Utilities.

In early January, Marin City Councils will decide whether to stay with MCE. Please write or call your council-members, attend meetings, speak up, and ask friends everywhere in Marin to do the same. See schedule and facts at: <http://www.marinenergyauthority.org>

By June, 2010, MCE expects to begin providing energy to participating towns and the County — serving mostly municipal customers at first, adding all consenting residential and business customers by 2011.

From Day One we'll get 25% renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.) — nearly twice what PG&E offers, at the same or lower rates. MCE will have a large, steady revenue stream from our bills, the essential ingredient that will enable it to finance construction of local solar, other renewables, and efficiency — without a penny from cities' general funds.

Marin County and MCE's mother agency, Marin Energy Authority, have diligently minimized risks, selecting a solidly financed, experienced energy services contractor to assist us for five years while Marin Clean Energy learns to walk on its own.

While some of us are dismayed that a subsidiary of an oil company, Shell N. America, filed the best of twelve bids for the first contract, this is a poor reason to kill our baby. We can convince MEA to disqualify such companies in the future, but we can't control PG&E, which has contracts with Shell today. Rejecting Marin Clean Energy because the water district might use it to greenwash desalination would be ineffective; as soon as the state lifts the freeze on "direct access" in 2011, big customers like MMWD will be able to buy green energy separately.

Now is the time to show the world what it means for a community to Go Green Together!

Five generations back, investor-owned utilities throughout the United States teamed up

with banks and insurance companies to oppose the public ownership of anything — in particular energy and health care. Pacific Gas & Electric Company developed such alliances during campaigns to defeat two statewide ballot measures in the early 1920s (the California Water & Power Act) and urged other utilities to use its formula. Accordingly, utilities mounted a massive public relations offensive, coordinated nationally by their trade association, producing a barrage of slanted news feeds and a steady stream of advertising that endeared them to the media. They even censored textbooks at all grade levels to eliminate positive references to government and negative references to corporations. The chilling effect on America's civic discourse was profound. Few people know that the collapse of irresponsible utility/banking/insurance empires helped trigger the 1929 crash; the media largely ignored a seven-year investigation by the Federal Trade Commission (google Confessions of the Power Trust). President Roosevelt crafted legislation to end the worst financial scams of utilities, banks and insurance companies, but did not fully disband the alliances utilities built to limit our thinking as well as our money and power.

Women's Energy Matters is a leading local advocate for Marin Clean Energy and is also a public interest advocate for increased efficiency and renewables at state regulatory agencies.

Your support for WEM's work is greatly appreciated!

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WEM

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