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California's Energy World is Changing Fast; Stop Puente

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Dear Commissioners,

California is closing down power plants that are only a few years old because no one is buying their power. (LA Times story linked below) Statewide, a glut of electric power from both fossil fuels and renewable power continues to grow. The state is energetically choosing green energy over fossil fuels.

Way back In 2014, when NRG won the right to build the large gas-powered Puente power plant on Oxnard's beach, the idea that solar and industrial-scale battery storage would be cheaper than fossil energy was only beginning to be realized. Today it is fully real.

In today's energy world, four years are the distant past. In 2014, the Aliso Canyon natural gas facility had not yet leaked and driven hundreds of families from their homes. The California Energy Commission's own chairman, Robert Weisenmiller, recently announced that he will lead closure of the Aliso Canyon facility within 10 years. (letter, July 17, to California PUC). The state is considering closure of all natural gas storage facilities over a somewhat longer time period, phasing out gas-fired plants as gas supply dwindles.

These shifts in thinking have also changed the view of cities. Smart communities are making solar generation and battery storage linchpins of their power futures. Oxnard is wisely among these cities, in part because its citizens are sick of their home being the dumping ground for beachside industrial uses.

Yet the California Energy Commission appears stuck inside a cage of its own making, citing one picayune rule or another to avoid accepting new information into its hearing records, unable to seriously consider the tsunami of change in the cost and production of power. The CEC, if it approves NRG's beachfront power plant, will be like a banker approving a loan to produce buggy whips at the dawn of the automobile.

The citizens of Oxnard and the rest of Ventura County will suffer the pollution, noise and unsightliness of Puente even as they and other ratepayers pay for the construction of a power plant they hate. NRG will receive a 10.5% a year profit, by state law. Stockholders will get off scot free, even if the plant is shut down after five years for lack of demand and sits as an abandoned hulk on our beach.

NRG gets the money but not the risk. Given the glut and growing obsolescence of fossil fuel plants in California, no regulator should approve the Puente plant just because NRG wants it and wants us, the ratepayers, to pay for it.

Judy Dugan, Hollywood Beach

Sources:

Los Angeles Times, "Californians are Paying Billions for Power They Don't Need." Feb. 5, 2017.

<http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-electricity-capacity/>

Letter, CEC Chairman Robert Weisenmiller, July 17. http://www.energy.ca.gov/releases/2017_releases/2017-07-19-energy-commission-chair-releases-letter-ailso-canyon_nr.pdf