



RECLAIM OUR POWER! Utility Justice Campaign

A better energy system is possible, without PG&E money in politics

In the wake of the [hottest summer on record](#), marked by [historic climate change-fueled heatwaves](#), millions of Californians face another burden - soaring PG&E utility bills. But this election offers a powerful solution: voters can choose candidates free from corporate influence to tackle these intersecting crises head-on.

The average cost of PG&E's residential electricity rates has [more than doubled in the last decade](#), with four rate hikes this year alone. PG&E now has the highest rates in California, contributing to the state's second highest energy costs, trailing only Hawai'i.

PG&E shows little interest in providing safe, reliable power at affordable rates. It's a for-profit company, owned by investors. It exists to maximize profit for their shareholders and maintain a monopoly over our grid. Last year, PG&E made \$2.6 billion in profits, up from \$2.3 billion in 2022. Of that, nearly \$1.8 billion was distributed to shareholders in the form of dividends. And PG&E's CEO, Patricia Poppe, made \$17 million in executive compensation last year.

Meanwhile, [one in five households in its service areas are in utility debt](#), which led to PG&E shutting power off to [more than 118,000 people this year](#). Just 2.22% of the \$950 million that PG&E spent on shareholder dividends through Q2 of 2024 could have covered the estimated cost to prevent all 117,907 of its shutoffs for non-payment through August of this year. Disconnection rates for non-payment are

even [higher in zip codes with higher percentages of Black, Latine and disabled people](#).

As Loretta Lynch, former president of the California Public Utilities Commission, or CPUC – the regulatory body overseeing the utilities – detailed, [PG&E admitted overcharging ratepayers by \\$3 billion in the last general rate case](#). CPUC commissioners granted PG&E their requested rate increase regardless.

Why was this allowed to happen?

CPUC commissioners are appointed by Governor Newsom. His [2018 campaign for Governor took \\$208,400 in contributions from PG&E](#), raising questions over whether PG&E has undue influence on both him and the CPUC.

Just last month, Governor Newsom vetoed [SB 1374](#), a bill that would have made rooftop solar systems more affordable for school districts and low-income renters. This veto vote is a gift to the utilities, which oppose rooftop solar.

Governor Gavin Newsom is not the only California elected official being financially supported by PG&E.

In the lead up to the 2018 elections, [eight out of every ten sitting state elected representatives took contributions from PG&E](#) despite the fact that the company had just been convicted of six felonies for the 2010 San Bruno gas pipeline explosion that killed eight people. During the 2020 campaign, [PG&E spent \\$2.1 million on political campaigns and ballot propositions](#). Outside elections, PG&E spends [\\$2.4 million per year](#) of our ratepayer funds to influence lawmakers, and is the eighth largest employer of lobbyists in the state.

Our skyrocketing utility bills pay for PG&E's influence, through political campaign contributions, advertising, and lobbying expenditures to the legislature.

In this year's legislative cycle alone, California legislators blocked bills aimed at limiting the ability of utilities to pass their lobbying and promotional advertising costs to ratepayers and ending revolving door lobbying at the CPUC.

What's at stake in this election cycle

Corporate-free candidates run campaigns that depend entirely on small grassroots donations. Once elected, these officials will be far more likely to listen to and vote in alignment with the interests of their constituents once they get into office than those whose campaigns are bankrolled by corporate interests - especially California's three investor-owned utilities.

As voters fill in mail-in ballots or prepare to go to the polls, they can learn if candidates for California state legislature are taking money from PG&E, Southern California Edison (SCE) or San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) or other corporations, and how much – by looking them up on the Secretary of State's [database](#).

We need state elected leaders who will reject contributions from PG&E and the other IOUs. By voting for corporate-free candidates, we can elect state decision makers who would be more likely to center the needs of ratepayers instead of utility investors and vote for common-sense policies that can lower rates, improve safety, and decrease corruption. Another better energy system is possible. We need legislators in office who are not bought off by the utilities, and who would be willing to advance solutions beyond the current for-profit utility model.

*The [Reclaim Our Power: Utility Justice Campaign](#), organizes a statewide coalition of nearly 90 community based organizations with a leadership team made up of social and environmental justice organizations, including Communities for a Better Environment, PODER SF, the Local Clean Energy Alliance, North Bay Organizing Project, Disability Justice Culture Club, Youth Vs Apocalypse, and People's Climate Innovation Center, is building the movement for the abolition of PG&E and the replacement of it through a community- and worker-led transition to a new energy system in alignment with principles for utility justice. Reclaim Our Power's recently published report, "***The Case For Golden State Energy: Benefits of a Nonprofit Utility Model to Serve California***" can be found [here](#).*