



## SMUD may have two Yolo votes

**In reversal, the board looks at an election in Sacramento County on annexation.**

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In a major political turnaround, SMUD is considering giving its Sacramento County customers a direct - and probably decisive - say on whether to annex eastern Yolo County.

The SMUD board next week will consider placing a measure on the November ballot that would give current ratepayers a binding vote on whether to expand SMUD service to include Davis, West Sacramento, Woodland and adjacent unincorporated area.

Meanwhile, Yolo County voters are expected to go to the polls to decide whether to join Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Under that scenario, a majority on each side of the Sacramento River would have to vote yes for SMUD to take over electric service for 70,000 Yolo County customers currently served by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. SMUD has about 575,000 customers in Sacramento County and a sliver of Placer County.

SMUD board members voted 5-2 in May to seek Yolo County annexation. Since then, SMUD has insisted that under state law, only Yolo County residents should vote on the annexation.

The proposal to let Sacramento County vote, as well, would dramatically change the political dynamics of annexation, which is strongly supported by Yolo County elected officials. SMUD's expansion plan is vehemently opposed by PG&E, which is spearheading a petition drive to force a nonbinding vote by current SMUD ratepayers.

SMUD officials unveiled plans Friday for the Sacramento County election. President Genevieve Shiroma said she would introduce the proposal at a committee meeting Wednesday and seek a board decision Thursday.

Shiroma blasted recent PG&E ads accusing SMUD of keeping ratepayers in the dark about annexation. She accused opponents of circulating "misleading" petitions and predicted SMUD would prevail "in an election debated and conducted out in the open."

"We will talk facts and present again and again the benefits of annexation for both Sacramento and Yolo counties," she said. "At the end of the day, the voters will see the difference between honest dialogue and political ads crafted behind closed doors."

The proposed ballot measure caught annexation supporters and opponents alike by surprise. Activists on both sides welcomed a direct vote by current SMUD customers, although some officials in Yolo County expressed concern that an expanded campaign would make it harder to win a majority on each side of the river.

"We see this as being a one-sided campaign," said Val Toppenberg, West Sacramento redevelopment and economic development director.

"We are going to be unable to conduct any kind of campaign in Sacramento County in the face of what we expect to be a very aggressive campaign on the part of PG&E."

PG&E spokeswoman Jann Taber accused SMUD of "low-balling" annexation costs and predicted SMUD customers would reject Yolo County expansion.

Jeff Raimundo of Citizens for Responsible and Affordable Energy said the PG&E-backed coalition has gathered more than the 35,000 signatures needed to force a nonbinding vote in Sacramento County. He said he welcomed the SMUD board's expected reversal of position.

Yolo County Supervisor Mariko Yamada predicted the proposed vote for current SMUD customers would present tough political challenges for communities seeking to join SMUD. But it "won't change our resolve on this side of the river," she said.

"We want to make sure that existing SMUD customers know we would never engage in this activity if there was any thought this would harm them," Yamada said.

The SMUD board will consider the ballot measure at a public meeting 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in the district headquarters, 6201 S St., Sacramento. The board is expected to vote 6 p.m. Thursday.

The proposal calls for the Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission, which is reviewing SMUD's annexation petition, to include a condition requiring voter approval in each county.

"If anything, it would probably alleviate a difficult decision by the commission on whether or not to call the election both here and over there," said Peter Brundage, LAFCO executive director.