

Hands across the river: the case for joining SMUD

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By Mariko Yamada

SPECIAL TO THE ENTERPRISE

The display of unity is stunning: every Yolo County elected official from the cities of Davis West Sacramento and Woodland, every member of the Board of Supervisors; the school districts and special districts; the patriarch of Nugget Markets and savvy high school students

They all support annexation to the Sacramento Municipal Utility District for the provision of our electric service. We reiterated that unanimity on Dec. 7 to the Sacramento County Local Agency Formation Commission the public body now considering our request - and restated our reasons. From our perspective, and based on the facts, we expect to see lower rates, better service reliability, and the responsiveness that comes from local control and public accountability.

The Board of Supervisors and our city partners included in the annexation study have been working with SMUD directors and their staff for nearly three years to analyze the issues involved in transferring to SIVIUD the responsibility for providing electric services for our communities. This effort, consistent with other efforts our board has undertaken this past year, has not been entered into lightly.

Here, it is important to remember that PG&E holds revocable franchises from us, the citizens and those of us who are elected to manage the public affairs of Yolo County. While we seldom agree on anything, we all agree on this.

As our communities on both sides of the Sacramento River share a common destiny, our electrical infrastructure, along with our transportation, housing, flood control and human services infrastructures should be

coordinated and integrated. There will, of course, be technical, legal and financial issues to be addressed by specialists in their respective fields, but doing so will enable us to plan and manage our futures together in a deliberate and thoughtful manner.

SMUD directors and their staff have also analyzed the issues from their perspective, and have articulated a compelling business case for including those Yolo County portions that could be integrated electrically into the Sacramento area system. That business case revolves around improved economies of scale and improved financial strength, leading to overall reductions in electricity costs.

As everyone knows, there are significant uncertainties in the energy business going forward. A careful expansion, as SMUD proposes to do through this annexation, will provide additional size and strength to an already well run organization.

PG&E has and can continue to play a role in our regional infrastructure. As the gas services supplier for Sacramento and Yolo, PG&E has an opportunity to play a positive and constructive role in the development of our regional economy and in the integration of the electric infrastructures, a posture befitting a good neighbor in our common future.

Up to now, however, PG&E has failed to grasp this opportunity. Rather, PG&E is actively engaged in employing the politics of fear and disinformation to divide Yolo County residents and businesses and further pit Sacramentans against Yoloans. Exact figures aren't readily available, but it is clear that PG&E has and will spend whatever it takes to obstruct our joint efforts.

Further, while PG&E hides under its cloak of corporate privacy by withholding significant valuation information - information that cannot be withheld before a court - SMUD and Yolo County officials have been subjected to repeated Public Records Act requests that border on harassment. To date, we have collectively provided PG&E with more than 30,000 pages of information, with more requests to come. Arrd, to what end?

We know also that PG&E has mid ated a street-level campaign to force an expensive, divisive and delaying advisory vote in Sacramento, and has begun walking door-to-door in West Sacramento and Woodland. Undoubtedly, we will see this presence in Davis. It's just a matter of when.

How unfortunate.

California has just concluded a long and bitter special election campaign, one in which millions of dollars spent resulted in a resounding rejection of the attempts to force the electorate to decide complex economic issues they have entrusted to-and expect - their elected officials and legislators to resolve. Especially in this context, PG&E's efforts to revive the special election mentality and to undercut the ability of SI4UD elected officials to move for-ward are profoundly misguided.

Their tactics can only further erode PG&E's standing in our community, one that has already been shaken by the energy crisis and the twin bankruptcies of PG&E and its PG&E Properties subsidiary, National Energy and Gas Transmission Inc., the former owner of the Conaway Ranch.

PG&E's attempts to drive wedges among our constituents around Yolo County and between Sacramento and Yolo can only bring further discredit on itself, and undermine any potential to restore our confidence_ As recent results demonstrate, if the voters are smart - and angry.

In the meantime, annexation proceedings are moving forward at Sacramento LAFCO toward a vote of the people on the Yo1o side of the river. Annexation law requires this election because the annexing authority - in this case, SMUD's elected board - has already been entrusted to make business decisions through an electoral process among its constituents. Residents of the territory to be annexed have typically not had the opportunity to vote for the officials representing the entity providing the services going forward.

In our case, the elected bodies of Yolo County and three I of its cities have unanimously supported the pursuit of annexation. The ultimate decision to annex will be made through a citizen-based and citizen-directed process involving Yolo voters. As Sacramento LAFCO deliberations continue, PG&E should understand that our resolve is clear and we will not be pitted against each other on either side of the river.

In Yolo County, we have analyzed the evidence and listened to our constituents, who have embraced public power over proprietary interests. We invite PG&E to consider an end to the politics of division and join with us in the best that a corporate neighbor could be.

Now, wouldn't that be refreshing?

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