



SMUD ponders vote on Yolo annexation

By Robert D. Dávila -- Bee Staff Writer

Published 2:15 am PST Thursday, January 12, 2006

Story appeared in Metro section, Page B3

Sacramento Municipal Utility District customers moved closer on two tracks Wednesday to getting a voice on whether SMUD should expand its boundaries to include part of Yolo County.

SMUD board members expressed support for the concept of a November ballot measure requiring current ratepayers to approve annexing Davis, West Sacramento, Woodland and adjacent unincorporated area. Meanwhile, annexation opponents turned in more than 52,000 petition signatures calling for SMUD customers to be guaranteed an advisory vote on any future expansion plans.

The competing ballot proposals reflect the growing battle over SMUD's effort to take over electric service to about 70,000 Yolo County customers served by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. If approved by local regulators, Yolo County residents would vote on annexation in November.

In October, a group backed by PG&E launched an initiative campaign to require SMUD to put any proposals for major boundary changes before ratepayers in a non-binding election. On Wednesday, the Coalition for Reliable and Affordable Electricity submitted petitions circulated by paid solicitors with nearly 50 percent more signatures than the 35,000 required to get the measure on the June ballot.

"It indicates there are a lot of Sacramento County taxpayers that are a little bit nervous about this annexation, thinking they may have to pay for it," said Ken Payne of the Sacramento County Taxpayers League, a member of the coalition.

Regardless of what SMUD decides about letting ratepayers vote on Yolo County expansion, the coalition will pursue the June initiative to change SMUD policy for

- The Bee's Robert D. Dávila can be reached at (916) 321-1077 or bdavila@sacbee.com

future annexations, group spokesman Jeff Raimundo said.

While the initiative would let current SMUD customers express a nonbinding preference, SMUD is considering letting ratepayers cast a deciding vote on annexation in November, regardless of what Yolo County residents say. SMUD directors denounced PG&E's petition campaign at a meeting Wednesday to discuss the binding ballot measure proposed by President Genevieve Shiroma.

"PG&E is interested in protecting its shareholders, not educating SMUD customers," board member Bill Slaton said.

Letting Sacramento and Placer county residents vote in a binding election would give them "stronger assurances that SMUD ratepayers will not pay any of the expense of annexation," Director Linda Davis said. Board member Susan Patterson expressed confidence that a binding ballot measure drafted in public hearings would serve ratepayers better than an advisory measure "that was cooked up in a political consultant's office."

The meeting drew only two speakers from Yolo County, where local elected officials strongly support joining SMUD.

Val Toppenberg, West Sacramento redevelopment and economic development director, thanked SMUD directors for pursuing annexation. Jerry Adler of the Davis Chamber of Commerce said taxpayer advocates oppose a "mitigation impact fee" that SMUD would impose on Yolo County customers to replace property taxes and fees paid by PG&E to local governments.

The SMUD board is set to vote on Shiroma's proposal at 6 p.m. today at SMUD headquarters, 6201 S St. The meeting is Webcast live and available in archives at www.smud.org.