

Action Update: Campaign Fights PG&E Bailout CPUC Sides with Wall Street, Puts Communities at Risk



On May 28, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) unanimously approved a deal between Governor Newsom and Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) for the company to exit bankruptcy, putting ratepayers, wildfire survivors, and our communities at grave risk. But this approval was strongly opposed, as described below, by the Reclaim Our Power Utility Justice Campaign.

In January 2019, in the wake of historic California wildfires like the 2018 Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 85 people, PG&E filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to avoid paying over \$30 billion in damage claims brought against the company for causing a rash of wildfires in 2017 and 2018. CPUC approval of a PG&E Plan of Reorganization was needed for the utility to exit federal bankruptcy court.

The PG&E bankruptcy case is huge in both its financial implications as well as the opportunity it provides to fundamentally change one of the biggest and most negligent private utilities in our country. At stake is whether PG&E is bailed out at ratepayer expense to wreak more wildfire and utility shutoff havoc, or whether it gets restructured to advance the safe, reliable, renewable, and equitable energy system we need to address a changing climate and a critical pandemic.

Reclaim Our Power Campaign Mobilizes for Justice



In March, the Governor, who had been critical of PG&E's bankruptcy exit plan, suddenly flipped and agreed to a deal with PG&E that would leave all of us holding the bag on a dangerous PG&E bailout. The Reclaim Our Power Campaign rapidly moved into action, pointing out how the PG&E exit plan bilks wildfire survivors, bails out PG&E shareholders at ratepayer expense, increases the risk of wildfires and utility power shutoffs, fails to provide credible oversight of the company, and fails to address community needs regarding climate change and the pandemic.¹

Over the months of April and May the Campaign went into high gear to bring public attention to this dangerous exit plan, put pressure on the CPUC to reject it, and call for changes to the plan that would address community needs, especially those communities most impacted by wildfires, utility shutoffs, rising utility bills, and the health and economic effects of the current pandemic.

Here are some of the actions taken by the Campaign:

Petitioning the Governor and CPUC: The Campaign launched two petition efforts that garnered more than a thousand signatures. The first petition² in April, called for the CPUC to reject the PG&E reorganization plan and “build the safe, reliable energy system we all need.” The second one³ in May, after a proposed decision to approve the plan had been released, called for a plan that “works for Californians, not for Wall Street,” based on criteria for what such a plan must do.

¹ See [PG&E's Bankruptcy Exit Plan and What It Means for You](#).

² https://actionnetwork.org/letters/cpuc-and-governor-newsom-stop-the-deal?clear_id=true

³ https://actionnetwork.org/letters/cpuc-and-governor-newsom-no-deal-without-justice-for-our-families?source=direct_link&

Street Protest and Online Press

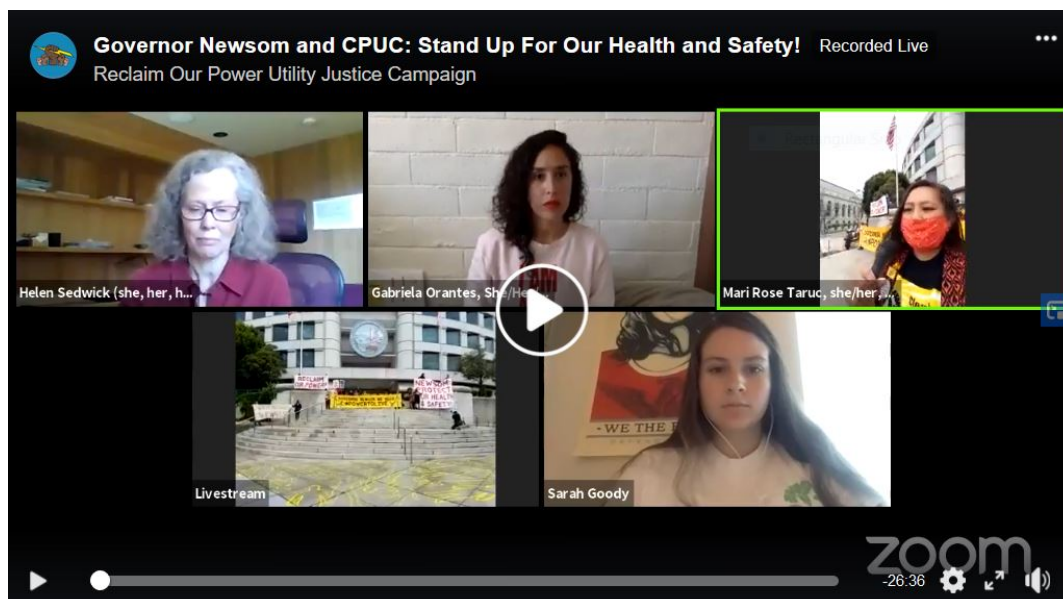
Conference. On May 20, amidst the pandemic and against a backdrop of banners and painted outlines of the 85 people killed in the Paradise wildfire—all in front of CPUC headquarters in San Francisco—the Campaign conducted a Facebook Live press conference⁴ featuring wildfire survivors, community organizations and youth climate activists from across the Bay Area. The press conference was seen by over 1300 viewers and major press, and was interrupted by state police called in to break up the event, presumably for blocking the entrance to a pandemic-vacant CPUC headquarters.



Public Comment at CPUC Meetings. The Campaign organized phone-in public comment (meetings were all online due to pandemic restrictions) at four consecutive CPUC meetings on April 16, May 7, May 21, and May 28 at which hundreds of activists and youth representing scores of organizations, called on the CPUC commissioners to reject the PG&E plan and instead vote for a restructured utility that could meet public needs.

Filing Briefs in the CPUC Proceedings. On May 11, two filings that outlined the Campaign’s demands on the Newsom/PG&E exit plan were submitted to the CPUC’s PG&E bankruptcy proceeding.⁵ These proposed changes called for full compensation to wildfire survivors, no added charges to ratepayer bills to pay off PG&E debt, true safety from utility-caused wildfires and power shutoffs, rigorous independent oversight of the utility, a sustainable, decentralized energy model, and acknowledgement of energy as a human right.

Meeting with Decision Makers. The Campaign leadership met with Governor Newsom’s top energy staff twice, CPUC commissioners’ staff, and the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group of the CPUC to press our case for meaningful restructuring of both PG&E and the energy system more broadly.



Reclaim Our Power Press Conference at CPUC headquarters and on Facebook Live, May 20, 2020

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/utilityjustice/videos/681325372435485/>

⁵ Wild Tree Foundation (<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Efile/G000/M337/K426/337426048.PDF>) and APEN/CBE/CEJA (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ep0FIUxU1t-BnDL4aMxDKcEHI8s9Frk_/view)

Putting Utility Justice on the State Agenda

The Reclaim Our Power Campaign's efforts to fight a dangerous Wall-Street PG&E bankruptcy exit plan were not yet strong enough to pressure the CPUC to reject the deeply flawed plan. However, the Campaign did succeed in bringing public attention to the inadequacies and dangers of the plan and to the kind of transformed utility needed to address the dangers posed to our communities by utility-caused wildfires, power shutoffs, and rising utility bills.

This kind of transformed utility is made more urgent by the current pandemic, when energy reliability and security is even more essential to keeping our homes and medical facilities operational during this public health and economic crisis. It is more evident than ever that we need a very different kind of utility than a bailed-out PG&E.

The actions described in this update were accomplished through broad public outreach and organizing, using both social networking and conventional media to project a narrative at odds with the energy establishment—one that was heard by community-based organizations, by CPUC commissioners and staff, by the Governor's office, by elected representatives, and by the public at large. The Campaign was highlighted in a [major article](#) in the *East Bay Express* and quoted in reports in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other publications. All this despite the constraints imposed by shelter in place.

As a result, the Campaign is positioning itself for Plan B—what is to be put in place when PG&E fails to implement its bankruptcy exit plan or fails to ensure public safety during the coming wildfire season. Through its efforts over the last several months, the Reclaim Our Power Campaign has established itself as the main organized force in California with the vision, principles, and framework for restructuring and democratizing the state's energy system to address the needs of our communities.

1. Take Action!

Print this sign & tweet your selfie

@GavinNewsom
@CaliforniaPUC
#cancelpge
#reclaimourpower
#powertolive

Gov. Newsom
Our health & safety is in your hands...
No Wall St PG&E bailouts.
No cheating fire survivors.
No more deadly shutoffs.
No more deaths.
www.tinyurl.com/badPGEdeal

Gov. Newsom
Our health & safety is in your hands...
No Wall St PG&E bailouts.
No cheating fire survivors.
No wildfires & shutoffs.
No more deaths.
www.tinyurl.com/badPGEdeal

2. Take Action!

Send this letter to Gov. Newsom and the CPUC!

tinyurl.com/badPGEdeal

the ACTION NETWORK

CPUC and Governor Newsom- No Deal Without Justice for Our Families!

PG&E has been working on a deal to emerge from bankruptcy, and it's not a good one, for the survivors, ratepayers, or our communities.

Will you send an email to Governor Newsom and the Public Utilities Commission urging them to reject the deal until they make it work for Californians, not for Wall St?

Commissioners and Governor Newsom:

I support the Reclaim Our Power Utility Justice Campaign's demands for a PG&E bankruptcy deal that works for the people of California, not Wall St. The CPUC commissioner and single personal decision does not live up to what Californians need from their energy system. Californians need true safety from fire, wildfire and shutoffs, including having impacted communities at the decision table about it, work, and have our power to shut off.

© 2019 May 16, 2020 from San Francisco, CA Twitter for iPhone

Comment of Tré Vasquez to CPUC Commissioners, May 28, 2020

I've lived through two wildfires in Sonoma County. During both fires, my community worked tirelessly—sacrificing sleep, meals, and the comfort of our own homes to care for those who had been displaced and traumatized by these fires caused by the recklessness of PG&E. We can't overlook the fact that all of this could have been prevented, and we should not have to live our lives doing damage control due to corporate greed.

Here in Sonoma County our relatives who work in the fields were back out working in evacuated areas

while wildfires were still burning. What I'm saying to you is that there are those of us whose lives are considered an afterthought. If this plan goes through to bail out PG&E, what that says to us is that our lives are worth sacrificing to conduct business as usual.

This is your opportunity to hold investor-owned utilities accountable. We need a transformational energy system based on a clean, decentralized energy model. We can build real solutions that value people and the earth before profit, and today you have the opportunity to make an ethical and humane choice. Please do so before it's too late.