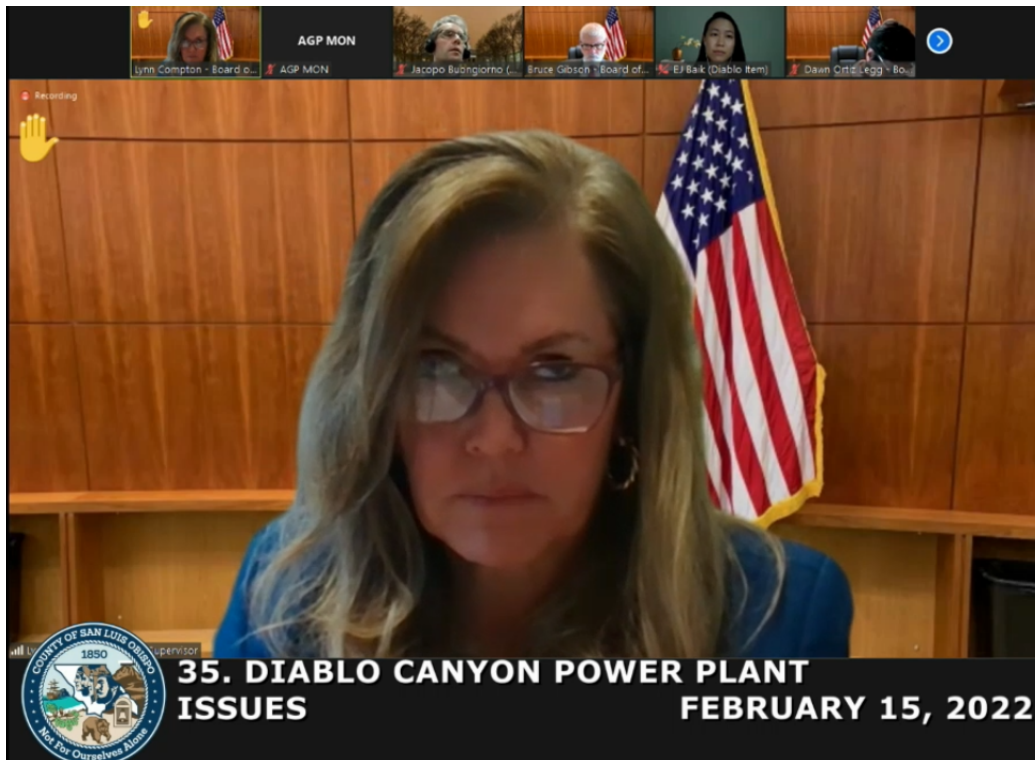


Nukelheads

Three SLO supervisors perform a Diablo kabuki



Here's what I think you think Supervisor Compton wants you to pay to keep Diablo open.

By Andrew Christie, Chapter Director

They have opposed the designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, attempted to use antique subdivision maps to blow up local land use planning (before the Sierra Club sued to stop them), twice voted to withhold the benefits of community choice energy from all residents of the county's unincorporated area (See "And Then There Was One" elsewhere in this issue), and gerrymandered SLO County's supervisorial districts to keep their party in power.

So it should have amazed no one on Feb. 15 when Supervisors Debbie Arnold, Lynn Compton, and John Peschong decided to get firmly on the wrong side of a major issue and voted to send a letter to Governor Gavin Newsom vaguely urging him to "work with PG&E to ensure that it has

access to all the permits necessary to keep the Diablo Canyon power plant operational” – something which PG&E has no intention of doing, no matter how much “access” it has.

Two months earlier, surveying the regulatory landscape, *The Tribune* had concluded “there’s no conceivable way the plant can remain open.”

Details, details.

Nuclear proponents continue to press for the classification of nuclear power as “clean energy,” touting it as a solution to the climate crisis superior to the development of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. But, [as I noted in New Times last December](#), “Nuclear finally getting out of the picture will mean the combination of solar, wind, storage, efficiency, and all and sundry flexible, non-baseline resources can be brought to bear.”

Or as PG&E puts it: “As more solar generation comes on line over time, and when its output is at peak supply (e.g., in the middle of the day), there is less room on the electric system for energy from inflexible and large baseload resources such as Diablo Canyon.”

Or as the Natural Resources Defense Council put it in 2016, when the agreement to close the plant was announced: “A giant resource operating 24/7 is increasingly disconnected from the needs of the system.”

And here’s the California Public Utilities Commission from last June: “The [clean energy] procurement we ordered is equal to the output of four large nuclear power plants or 20 natural gas plants. Included is solar, wind, geothermal, and long duration storage—pumped hydro facilities or other emerging technologies that can store energy for eight hours or longer. Our actions today will ensure that we can keep the lights on during periods of greatest demand, even as we retire Diablo Canyon and other natural gas plants.”

Nevertheless, when the authors of the Stanford/MIT study of Diablo presented its blithe, blue-sky recommendation that the aging nuclear plant blow past the end date of its licenses and continue to run for another decade, Supervisors Compton, Arnold, and Peschong agreed to fire off a letter to the Governor. In his lone, common-sense dissent, Supervisor Bruce Gibson suggested the board might wish to redirect its enthusiasms to the support of feasible sources of clean energy instead of trying to pull Diablo back by its tail feathers.

In my December *New Times* column, I cited multiple reasons why Diablo must close – and *The Tribune* [has cited many more since](#) – but there was one more reason I didn’t get around to (850 word limit, whaddayagonnado?)

In a word: Money.

Keeping Diablo open would first require making it financially viable, which would mean breaking the back of California’s Renewable Portfolio Standard by stretching it to somehow include nuclear (as departing Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham earnestly attempted to do).

But even if we did that, a comparison of the full cost of continuing to operate and maintain the nuclear power plant versus the cost of replacing it with a portfolio mix of 75% renewable energy and 25% energy efficiency technologies [has been studied](#), and that study became the basis of PG&E's decision to shutter the plant. Of those two options, renewables-plus-efficiency would cost \$12 billion. The nuclear option (so to speak) would cost \$17 billion. Needless to add, ratepayers forking over that extra \$5 billion to fund Diablo's extended life would mean \$5 billion not available for solar, wind, etc.

Inevitably, prior to voting to prevail upon the governor to...do something...to keep Diablo open, Supervisor Compton weighed in with a bold challenge to reality, saying "I think the vast majority of our constituents in this county are very supportive of it and would love to see it, for the economic benefits and the clean energy, move forward and continue to operate."

In other words, three county supervisors overlooked at least five billion reasons why Diablo should close.