

With all due respect, we beg to differ. A recent opinion proffered by the Chronicle on “direct access” and the efforts of California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to reestablish customer choice in energy suppliers was flat wrong.

Californians don’t “vehemently” disagree with customer choice. Californians OVERWHELMINGLY defeated Proposition 80 that would have eliminated a customer’s right to choose their energy provider.

Through extensive research and polling, the California Alliance for Competitive Energy Solutions (CACES) has found that people **ARE** in fact ready to explore ways in which California can allow for customer choice. In a survey commissioned by CACES earlier this year, 90 percent of respondents supported the ability to choose energy providers. The overwhelming majority of those surveyed feel they’ll benefit when energy companies have to compete for their business.

Rate stability and the potential for state economic benefits were also identified by respondents as important byproducts of a competitive energy market. The important point is that customers should be free to choose among service plans offered by competitive energy suppliers.

The survey results also illustrated that environmental concerns have overtaken the cost of energy for some buyers, as 57 percent said they would choose environmentally responsible sources of energy versus 38 percent who would choose based on price alone. Customer choice will not only help businesses, schools and the economy, but it will open up doors for new and innovative technologies and energy sources.

Extensive experience in other markets demonstrates the benefits of competition to customers. As one example, an October 2008 study by Dr. Susan Tierney, recently tapped as co-lead of President-elect Obama’s energy transition team, found that average competitive retail prices in Texas were significantly lower than a proxy for what regulated rates would have been. The CPUC has had extensive proceedings over the last 18 months to evaluate all aspects of reopening the market, and looking at where California has moved since the energy crisis. The proceeding has in fact been a thoughtful, thoroughly vetted and open public process. And the work continues in a thoughtful, well researched and open public process.

Californians are ready for electric choice again. Over the last seven years, new programs, energy sources, usage and dependency issues have all evolved greatly. We are now in an age where “clean” and “green” energy are options that companies can provide to their customers -- but not if they don’t have a choice. Instead of being chained to the machine that brought us into California’s dire climate situation, it’s time that we open up and allow customers and small business owners to choose how they buy their energy.

We are hopeful that the CPUC and the Legislature can work together to find the best way to open the market and give choice back to Californians.

Bottom line – we believe consumer empowerment should be part of California’s energy future. And OK, the Chronicle was right about one thing. We would like to bring cupcakes to the people of California. We just think it’s best to let them choose the flavor.

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