



CALIFORNIA FORUM

How California can regionalize its energy system without handing Trump the grid

BY V. JOHN WHITE
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As lawmakers return from their summer recess, one of the most heated debates will center around a bill to restructure an important part of the state's electricity industry. Assembly Bill 813 by Assemblyman Chris Holden, D-Pasadena, would open the door to expanding California's electrical grid and integrating with the transmission systems of neighboring states.

Modernizing the grid will help California and our neighbors meet ambitious climate goals over the next two decades as we move to an electrical grid powered by 100 percent renewable energy. While it is essential that we continue to build momentum toward carbon-free electricity, we must proceed carefully and be certain California's economic, environmental and political interests are protected.

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CALIFORNIA POLICY MAKERS SHOULD TAKE CARE THAT WE DO NOT CEDE TOTAL CONTROL OVER OUR STATE'S POWER GRID BEFORE DETERMINING HOW IT WILL BE GOVERNED, OR WORSE, GIVING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION INCREASED INFLUENCE IN WHAT KIND OF POWER CALIFORNIANS USE IN THEIR HOMES AND BUSINESSES. THAT'S WHY AB 813 SHOULD BE AMENDED BEFORE IT IS PASSED.

California policy makers should take care that we do not cede total control over our state's power grid before determining how it will be governed, or worse, giving the Trump Administration increased influence in what kind of power Californians use in their homes and businesses.

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That's why AB 813 should be amended before it is passed by state lawmakers and signed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

In its current form, AB 813 would direct regulators and elected officials in California to give up control over the governance of the state's power system without knowing what will replace it. The bill unnecessarily limits California's role in any new regulatory entity, specifying that our state will have just three members out of 12 or more members on a new multi-state committee, which would have the power to confirm or reject nominees to the new regional oversight board.

California has already begun building deeper partnerships with neighboring states on key energy issues. But it is illogical and unreasonable for California to give up oversight of the grid without a clear idea of what the final governance of the grid will look like.

Creating a modernized, efficient, regional transmission system will require difficult trade-offs between independence, political accountability and control over key energy decisions. But in its current form, AB 813 would leave Californians flying blind as we attempt to steer our state's energy future, and preemptively limit California's voice in determining what that future looks like.

As drafted, AB 813 vastly limits the role of the Governor and the Legislature in shaping the future of California's power grid, handing out-of-state regulators a blank check with limited constraints and little or no political accountability.

This is unwise and unnecessary.

Getting the regional grid fully integrated and operational will take years. It makes sense to move forward with much of what is in AB 813, but to delay adoption of final governance details for the Legislature and the next governor as we continue to build the foundation for a regional grid.

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A regional electrical grid must operate with transparency, and protect the interests of California ratepayers and energy users. California and our neighbors should continue working together to develop and finalize a governance structure that makes sense for all parties involved, and one that protects California's interests from federal meddling. That final

plan should be ratified by the Legislature and signed by the next Governor after it is fleshed out in detail.

The future of our electrical grid is too important to leave to a blind promise and blank check to regulators from other states. Our history with energy reform tells us we must maintain a firm hand and watchful eye over California's energy future and ensure the transition to more clean, renewable energy protects California ratepayers as well as our environment.

V. JOHN WHITE IS PRINCIPAL V. JOHN WHITE ASSOCIATES, AN ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY LOBBYING PRACTICE. HE CAN BE CONTACTED AT VJW@CEERT.ORG.



V. John White

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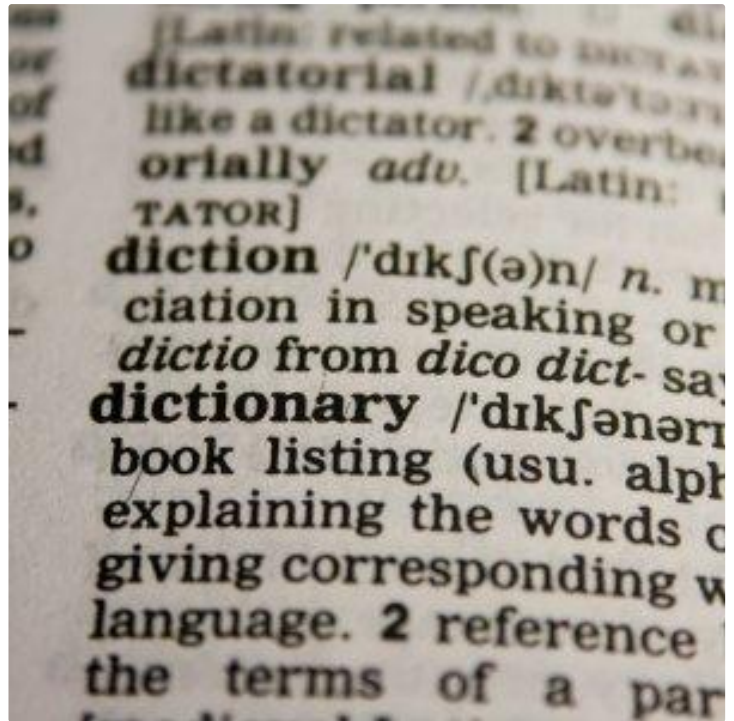
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