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## Ripon leaders favor SSJID over PG&E

RIPON — The South San Joaquin Irrigation District plan to provide retail electrical power to Ripon got the nod of city fathers Tuesday night at the end of an emotionally heated council meeting.

The councilmen voted 4-0 with Mayor Chuck Winn excusing himself from the council table due to a conflict of interest in the matter.

The council's affirmative vote was a complete reversal of the city's stand from the last time SSJID came to them for support more than a year ago. The SSJID will now attempt to gain the approval of the Local Agency Commission (LAFCO) for its plan to provide retail electric distribution services in Ripon, Manteca and Escalon service areas. Ripon joins Manteca in officially siding with SSJID that is moving forward in a bid to reduce power costs to consumers 15 percent across the board.

There were some 20 speakers who went to the microphone with their pros and cons over the irrigation district's move against Pacific Gas & Electric Company's hold on retail electric distribution service in the community.

PG&E lined up speakers on their behalf – mostly from Stockton – who warned of catastrophic results that would plague the community if an inexperienced SSJID took over the power business in the Ripon, Escalon and Manteca market.

Jennifer Sanguinetti – a Ripon stay-at-home mom – said it all sounded like “smoke and mirrors” to her in the emotional presentation for PG&E.

“I am for SSJID and want to say everybody who spoke for it lives in Ripon – only one PG&E speaker was from Ripon,” she said.

She added that the \$74 million that was in question during the discussion was not from taxes as suggested but rather from “smart business practices.” She further suggested that a business does not give money back it has collected over the last 100 years.

She also countered that Modesto Irrigation District (MID) couldn't be compared to SSJID because it obviously had more than the local 38,000 customers.

Kate Schulenberg said she worked for the Turlock Irrigation District when it attempted to provide power to the West Side of the district. Patterson was the only community that they were able to attract, she said, with the power distribution being a lot more expensive than anyone thought.

“We found a lot of costs we really didn't realize and we had to apply a surcharge,” she

said.

Veronica Ceja, a Stockton PG&E service representative for the last six years, said she loves her customers saying, "This is a government takeover we can't let happen. We need less government – not more."

Several PG&E speakers questioned SSJID's ability to handle emergency power outages as was seen in the recent storm that hit the valley resulting in mass outages of power. Some 9,000 customers were without power in Manteca, Ripon and Escalon, they said.

Ripon farmers Dave Phippen and Bob Brocchini took to the lectern voicing their support for the SSJID proposal. Phippen said, "This is a culmination of a 100-year vision where water has flowed for so many years."

He added, "We will have local representatives taking care of our power. This is hydro power -- a big advantage for our community."

Brocchini said it's time for a change. SSJID has a proven record. They're not doing it for profit but because they are part of the community, he stressed.

### **SSJID would welcome PG&E workers**

SSJID Director Jeff Shields told the council that the irrigation district is prepared to spend \$63.8 million for construction of facilities and separation from PG&E. He also noted his district would employ 68 new permanent workers in addition to the 100 already on staff – with the door open to PG&E employees if they want to come on board. He complimented those workers, saying they have been very well trained. One PG&E staffer was quick to respond at the microphone saying none of his fellow workers would jump ship and go to work for SSJID.

Shields further claimed there would be an annual \$11.6 million savings within the district, dropping the average family's power bill by \$349 a year.

In its resolution the Ripon City Council stated that the provision of retail electric distribution service by the SSJID could provide significant benefits to individual taxpayers, business and local governmental entities that include a promised reduction of electric rates by 15 percent.

In their resolution they cited a likely improvement in the local economy adding that it would entrust electrical service policies and practices to locally elected officials who are directly accountable to voters in the communities SSJID services.

They also noted there could be increased job opportunities in the local communities as well with an improving customer service and an increased reliability of service. Real estate broker Randy Brekke told council members that he failed to bring assembly plants into Ripon in the past simply because power costs were seen as being too high.

Former Ripon Unified School District Superintendent Leo Zuber had urged the council to look at the SSJID proposal – he read it through on a six-hour flight to Philadelphia. He questioned the string of people speaking against the plan saying they were emotional.

"This is not a bunch of farmers from Escalon, Ripon and Manteca," he said in his support of the proposal. "There is no reason to believe they can't do it," he said.

"This is a good proposal – good for the residents and good for the city – it should go forward," he urged.

Mike Hakeem – an attorney from Stockton – said his vision is somewhat narrowed and focused in support of PG&E.

"It's premature," he said. "What you have been told tonight is less than accurate."

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