

Tags: January 2014, Luz P, Pio Pico

URL: <http://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/01/to-hell-with-pio-pico-its-time-for-a-la-iolla-power...>

## To Hell with Pio Pico – It’s Time for a La Jolla Power Plant

by DOUG PORTER on JANUARY 8, 2014 · 2 COMMENTS

in ACTIVISM, ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, THE STARTING LINE

*By Doug Porter*

The pattern of dirty development has become undeniable in the San Diego area. Attempts to abate or oppose polluting projects in neighborhoods with higher percentages of non-whites are cast by proponents of those projects as critical to the regional economy.



A simple nine block buffer zone protecting Barrio Logan from pollution associated with the maritime industry gets attacked as threatening the entire industry. And now a proposed power plant in Otay Mesa has been reborn in the wake of last year’s closure of the San Onfre nuclear facility.

Meanwhile, a “controversy” caused by the odor of sea lion poop in La Jolla gets [major media coverage](#). Oh. My. Goodness.

Maybe we can work out a trade. On second thought, forget that idea. Let’s just get a power plant built upwind of La Jolla. Then they won’t be bothered by the sea beasts so much.

“The proposal to build Pio Pico in Otay Mesa continues this area’s legacy as the pollution dumping ground of the region,” says San Ysidro resident Luz Palomino in a press release from the Environmental Health Coalition. “The health and quality of life in our community has suffered for decades at the hands of pollution and we simply can’t take any more. Why can’t we have clean air like every other San Diego neighborhood?”



Otay Mesa is already heavily burdened with toxic pollution from an existing power plant and heavy truck traffic, ranking in the worst twenty percent of zip codes most burdened by cumulative environmental impacts in California. It already fails to meet state standards for [particulate matter](#)—a pollutant linked with a variety of health problems

and known to increase the number and severity of asthma attacks and cause or advance various lung diseases.

And, oh yeah, over eighty percent of the residents of Otay Mesa are people of color.

Local environmental organizations, including the Environmental Health Coalition, the Sierra Club, the California Environmental Justice Alliance and San Diego [350.org](#) are up in arms following a preliminary decision by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to approve construction of the Pio Pico Power Plant.

From [KPBS](#):

*The CPUC had previously rejected the plant, but plans were amended after Southern California Edison decided to [retire the reactors at the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station](#). San Diego Gas & Electric, which received 20 percent of the power from San Onofre, would get the energy from the Pio Pico plant.*

*The judge's decision tentatively allows SDG&E to purchase power from the 305-megawatt plant for 25 years, beginning in 2017, and charge its customers accordingly, subject to a cap.*

*The plant is slated for 10 acres along Alta Road, adjacent to the Otay Mesa Generating Project. It's known as a "peaker" plant that would kick into operation during periods of high demand on SDG&E's system.*

It should be noted that plans for the Quail Brush plant, located near the Santee City limits, which were rejected by the CPUC simultaneously with those for Pio Pico in March of last year have not been reactivated. Environmental groups in both communities fought the original proposals tooth and nail.

County Supervisors Dianne Jacob and Dave Roberts opposed the Quail Brush plant, saying would harm the environment, create visual blight in nearby Mission Trails Park, intrude upon sensitive habitats and set back regional efforts to develop cleaner forms of energy. San Diego City Councilman Scott Sherman also opposed the Quail Brush project.

So the political will of an already more polluted community, which has less friends in high places will be tested again.

“The Commission’s proposal is bad news for all Californians,” says Strela Cervas of California Environmental Justice Alliance. “Pio Pico will have consequences far beyond our local community. With this needless power plant, San Diego and California fall backwards in the struggle against climate change and a healthy future.”



The groups opposing construction warn that CPUC approval will lead to the following:

- Increases in chronic respiratory illnesses, including asthma, in the surrounding communities because of more pollution
- SDG&E customers will pay \$1.6 billion for construction and operation of the plant
- For each year of the 25-year contract, the power plant will release toxic air and greenhouse gases equivalent to that produced by 129,584 gasoline-powered cars or burning 70 million gallons of gasoline
- Climate change impacts will continue in San Diego, including an acceleration of wild fires, sea level rise, drought and heat waves

The Commission will hold a public hearing and final vote on the proposed decision as early as February 5 in San Francisco at the Commission’s regularly scheduled business meeting. Public may attend and speak at the hearing and/or provide written comments to the [Commission’s Public Advisor’s office](#).

The proposal to build more gas fired power plants needs to be understood in the context of a national campaign orchestrated by the American Legislative Exchange Council opposing

all forms of renewable energy mandates and incentives. An ALEC affiliated group dropped \$3.7 million in nearby Arizona last year, waging a lobbying and P.R. campaign in support of legislation allowing utility companies to penalize private generation of power via solar panels.

The Koch brothers and the fossil fuel industry have rolled out a nationwide assault to repeal state Renewable Electricity Standards (RES), a key component, along with such federal tax incentives as the wind production tax credit (PTC), in driving renewable energy growth in the United States.

## **Plastic Bag Ban Advocates Get Encouraging News**



A lawsuit by Save the Plastic Bag Coalition has failed to persuade a California appeals court to overturn San Francisco's ban on single-use plastic bags.

The First District Court of Appeals published a ruling last Friday, saying it can serve as precedent binding on lower courts. The SF ordinance was passed in February 2012 and prohibits plastic bags that can be used only once and requires stores to charge 10 cents for recyclable plastic or paper bags.

A similar measure sponsored by City Councilwoman Sherri Lightner is moving through the approval process in San Diego. Opponents staged a press conference in December, calling any ban on plastic bag "a multimillion-dollar tax on San Diegans."

A [study](#) by the Encinitas-based Equinox Center found that 500 million of the bags are used in San Diego annually, and 350 million fewer would be used if the proposed ordinance was adopted. The report found that neither retailers nor consumers suffered significant economic damage in the jurisdictions around the state where bans are in effect. Shoppers in those areas paid an initial \$7.70 to purchase reusable bags, according to the Equinox Center, but the costs diminished over time as the bags were reused.

Another [study](#) recently completed in Washington DC, which enacted a plastic bag ban in January 2010, found that household use declined from 10 to 4 disposable bags per week.

Reinforcing this finding, seventy-nine percent of businesses reported that their customers are using fewer disposable bags, with a fifty percent median reduction in bags used.

## **Focusing on California's Food Challenges**

The California Food Policy Council, a coalition of more than a dozen activist groups from around the state, has released a [report](#) analyzing 27 bills considered by the legislature in 2013 they say were relevant to policies addressing progressive positions on access to healthier food choices.



From the [San Francisco Chronicle](#):

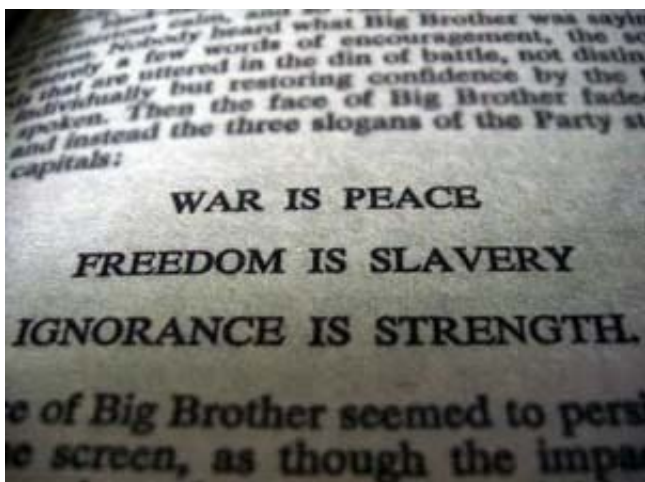
*'A lot more can be done that hasn't been done,' said [Michael Dimock](#), the group's strategic adviser and president of Roots of Change, a nonprofit dedicated to revamping food policy. "We think California is a bellwether for food and agriculture policy and Californians are more interested than ever in local food systems."*

*It won't be long before voters in this state are backing candidates and legislators based on their food and farm platforms, Dimock said. The California Food Policy Council hopes to be a significant resource for voters as well as to politicians and policy circles that need guidance on what the public wants. Legislation such as making food stamps available to [Medi-Cal](#) recipients, taxing soda and supporting more farm-to-fork programs are just a few of the types of bills they're monitoring.*

## **Congressional Republicans Circle the Wagons**

A majority of Democrats in Washington and elsewhere seem to have finally gotten the message that economic inequality is a real concern for many Americans. And Republicans are even making noises about acknowledging the importance of the issue.

From [Talking Points Memo](#):



*A memo from House leadership to the Republican caucus coaches members on how to speak about unemployment in a compassionate manner, according to the [Washington Post](#).*

*The memo tells representatives that unemployment is a ‘personal crisis’ and asks them to give ‘proper consideration’ to an extension of longterm unemployment benefits.*

As the Congress considers legislation in the coming months it's important to remember that any GOP support comes with a standard price tag: repeal, obstruct or delay Obamacare. So despite the reports in the news media today about the Senate's procedural vote on extending emergency unemployment benefits, I wouldn't get my hopes up for any actual progress.

From [Think Progress](#):

*As Congress is attempting to negotiate a deal to extend unemployment benefits to the [1.3 million Americans](#) who lost them at the end of December, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) is seizing the opportunity to refocus attention on Obamacare. On the Senate floor on Tuesday, McConnell suggested that Democrats should agree to a one-year delay in Obamacare's individual mandate in order to offset the cost of reinstating unemployment benefits for one year.*

*‘I'd like to propose that... my side be allowed to offer an amendment to pay for these benefits by lifting the burden of Obamacare's individual mandate for one year, and take care of our veterans who were harmed by the recently agreed to budget deal while we are at it, in the same amendment,’ the Kentucky lawmaker [said](#).*

*The GOP has repeatedly pushed to delay Obamacare's individual mandate, a proposal that would ultimately increase the number of [uninsured Americans](#) and [raise premiums](#) in the individual market. Health policy experts agree that it's [too late](#) to make such a major change to the structure of the health reform law, since the individual mandate — which incentivizes people to pu*