When it comes to protecting California ratepayers, TURN worked hard to make 2016 a momentous year, passing key legislation to secure a cleaner, safer, and more affordable future for our state. TURN celebrated these significant achievements with a reception in Sacramento on January 13, 2017 honoring the legislative champions who worked tirelessly in 2016 fighting for consumer rights and protections.

TURN was able to give awards to the representatives that were crucial in getting important bills passed. Senator Ben Hueso (D-San Diego) headlined the TURN Legislative Champions Reception with recognition for authoring and winning adoption of Senate Bill 215 (along with Senator Mark Leno), which closed the back door utilities have been using at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). SB 215 is last year’s CPUC reform bill, SB 660. Although it was vetoed by the Governor the first time around, TURN kept working until we won new rules against back door deals with utilities and tighter standards for eliminating bias. The Commission’s cozy relations with utility companies have resulted in betrayals of the public trust in the past, something we hope will never happen again.

Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco) was also hailed for authoring and winning adoption of AB 1110, which requires uniform standards for reporting of greenhouse gas reduction. While nutrition labels allow for a comparison of the ingredients in foods, there was no similar way to easily compare the carbon content of energy sold as “green.” As a result, anyone could market “zero car-
Dear TURN Champion,

You deserve thanks for making 2016 one of the most successful year in TURN history! In partnership with thousands of TURN members, allies, and supporters, your contributions, letters, and testimonies have combined with the small, dedicated TURN staff to protect your pocketbooks, safeguard your privacy, keep phones connected, promote safety and accountability, and save the planet.

Please join me in recognizing the contributions of professional staff and board members who joined Team TURN in 2016.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF WELCOME IN 2016

Gabriela Sandoval, research director, manages the End Shut-off Projects, which protects families with life-threatening medical conditions and puts the brakes on rate increases for all utility customers. Gabriela is a former university professor of sociology.

Kendra Lewis, development director, coordinates strategies to increase and diversify our revenue from members, foundations, and special events. Kendra brings 20 years of fundraising experience from a wide range of nonprofits.

Ashley Salas, staff attorney, works in the San Diego TURN office keeping telecom providers accountable to customers for consumer rights, privacy protections, and reliable service everywhere all the time. Ashley also continues to serve as a guide at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park on weekends.

MESSAGE FROM TURN’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hoey and recently promoted senior legal assistant, Haley De Genova. Led by CFO Richard Perez, this team’s names don’t appear on any individual case, but their diligence and hard work is a key part of every one of our successes.

We appreciate each and every one of you who has made a membership contribution or special donation to TURN throughout the years. I would like to invite you to consider additional ways that a growing number of TURN champions have chosen to support our campaigns for corporate accountability and consumer rights.

1. Speak Out Champion

Make your voice heard loud and clear by joining as a Speak Out Champion! Your monthly contribution provides TURN with California resources needed to ensure that grassroots voices like yours are heard by policymakers at CPUC meetings across the state, public hearings all over California, and in the halls of the Capitol in Sacramento. Give a shout to me at 415-929-8876 or mtoney@turn.org.

2. Fair Share Champion

Every share of stock you share with TURN strengthens our ability to demand corporate accountability to make sure you get every bit of respect and customer service that you deserve. Reach out to CFO Richard Perez at 415-954-3805 for all the details you would need to provide to your broker.

3. Sylvia Siegel Legacy Fund

The power of planned giving is that your gift to TURN lasts as long as there are utility and telephone companies to fight. TURN has been around for 45 years, and you can provide the foundation for our next 45 years of California corporate accountability. Contact me anytime at 415-929-8876 or mtoney@turn.org.

There are many challenges facing consumers in 2017, especially with threats of drastic cuts to federal energy assistance and weatherization grants to needy California residents. Yet, I am confident that working together, we can put the brakes on rate increases, win stronger consumer protections, protect basic telephone service, and promote a safer and cleaner energy system. Thanks again for your partnership.

Hoey

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Changes in Residential Rates

Dear Mystified,

You are right that PG&E bills are changing, and will go up for many customers. TURN opposed this change that will mean that conservation-minded customers are likely to pay more.

The change can be seen in the “ELECTRIC USAGE” section of your bill. Unless you have very high usage, you may not have noticed that your electric bills used to have a “tier four” with charges for this usage set at a much higher rate. Now, PG&E will offer residential rates with only three tiers. But the lower tier rates will be higher than before. The majority of customers, those who keep their usage low, are likely to end up paying more.

THE WAY IT HAS BEEN:

Tier 1: $ 1.8/kWh (baseline allowance) Tier 2: $2.24/kWh (101-200% of baseline allowance) Tier 3: $4/kWh (201%+ of baseline)

THE WAY IT WILL BE:

Tier 1: $ 1.199/kWh (baseline allowance) Tier 2: $ 2.27/kWh (101-400% of baseline) Tier 3: New Tier 3 or “High Usage Surcharge” is about $ 0.40/kWh (401% of baseline)

By law, the baseline allowance is set at between 50-60% of average usage in 10 different climate zones within PG&E’s service territory, and summer and winter amounts are different.

Because the baseline structure is tied to actual usage in different geographical areas, customers living in hot zones (inland areas) receive significantly larger summer bills than customers living on the coast. This is because average usage in the area reflects the need for more air conditioning than in cooler climes. PG&E offers optional rate schedules that rely on time-of-use rates. It may be worth checking out how your monthly bill would be affected under these optional rate offers. You can see the potential impact on your bill by going to PG&E’s website, logging into their “My Energy” system, and using their rate comparison tool, or call a customer service representative and ask them to help.

It is especially important to review your bill carefully when there are changes afoot. Don’t hesitate to question drastic differences from previous year’s usage, extreme price spikes, or inexplicable or misleading charges.

ASK ANA MONTES

TURN members can contact our consumer advisor Ana Montes by calling TURN’s consumer hotline, at 800-355-8876, or you can email her at: consumerhotline@turn.org.

Dear Consumer Advisor,

I have heard that my PG&E bill is changing—for the worse—but I don’t really understand what is going on or why. Can you explain?

Sincerely, Mystified

TURN would like to thank all of our Legislative Champions for their hard work in fighting against Big Utility, and for having the courage to stand up to CPUC corruption, and stick up for customers. Thank you!

boring” power without backing up the claim. With AB 1110 TURN sought consistent consumer disclosures for all retail electric suppliers. With this bill, TURN’s campaign to force all 2016 customers can now be sure that when they pay a premium or choose a provider who claims to be selling green energy, they are getting what they pay for, not getting greenwashed.

The passage of key legislation aimed at protecting California ratepay- ers was crucial to TURN’s successful legis- lative year, but we didn’t let any stealth utility attacks on consumers get by us. Assemblymembers Lorena Gonzalez-Fletcher (D-San Diego) and Brian Dahle (R-Redding) were feted for their role in protecting phone service for Californians by opposing and defeating AB 2395 (Low, D-Campbell)—one of worst utility schemes to come out of the Capitol in a long time. AB 2395 would have allowed AT&T to abandon landline copper wires in vulnerable communities, and put an end to longstanding universal service commitments. TURN helped lead the coali- tion in opposition to AB 2395 which would have put the brakes on landline telephone service in underserved rural and urban communities. TURN also worked to preserve funding for a Califor- nia Public Utilities Commission study of phone network reliability.

“It’s important to honor our political representatives for doing the right thing, and standing up for California ratepay- ers,” said Ignacio Hernández, founder of Hernández Strategy Group, TURN’s dedi- cated lobbyists in Sacramento. “These bills could not have passed without the sponsorship and support from our State Legislative Champions, and we want to thank them and honor them for their vital work in fighting against cor- ruption at the CPUC, and working towards a cleaner, safer, and more affordable fu- ture for California,” he said.

TURN would like to thank all of our Legislative Champions for their hard work in fighting against Big Utility, and for having the courage to stand up to CPUC corruption, and stick up for customers. Thank you!
Consumers Fight Back—and Win!

Everything we do at TURN is aimed at three core areas of our mission: to represent the interests of utility customers, educate and empower consumers, policymakers and even the utilities themselves, and reach out to underserved communities so that the people most impacted by CPUC decisions can have a voice.

Your donations and support are what allow us to fight back and stand up for the rights of our TURN members, and for consumers throughout California.

A Great Dad TURNS to TURN for Help

A longtime TURN Member we’ve nicknamed Great Dad contacted TURN, upset and frustrated when problems with his utility led to a threatened shut-off, right in the middle of an especially hard time. He’d received a disconnection notice from Sempra-owned Southern California Gas Company due to partial non-payment of the smart meter opt-out fee, which he believes is unfair. To make matters worse he had become disabled, leaving him dependent on Worker’s Comp Benefits to support both himself and his son, who has Down’s Syndrome.

Great Dad had switched to a Core Gas Transport Agent (CTA) in 2013 in hopes of bringing down his gas bill. But he wasn’t informed that he would have to re-apply for the CARE low-income rates he was eligible to receive, so he lost his CARE discount. After becoming dissatisfied with his switch to CTA Zoom Energy, Great Dad switched back to SoCal Gas in 2016, and signed up for the CARE program. However, once he switched back to SoCal Gas he was hit with the $75 opt-out fee which he disputed by paying only a very small amount each month toward it.

Many gas customers have contacted TURN with similar concerns and are looking for ways to keep their gas bills affordable. By switching companies, he no longer had to pay a fee he objected to. However, once he switched back to SoCal Gas, he found himself in a position where he was hit with a bill he could not afford to pay because of the opt-out fee and turned to TURN for help.

“TURNTips: Your Rights as a Gas Customer

1. If you have received a 24-hour shut-off notice and have not been able to work out a payment plan with your utility company, call the CPUC 800 number at 1-800-649-7570 before 4:30 PM.
2. If you switch to a Core Transport Gas provider, you will not lose your CARE discount.
3. If you opt out and are a CARE customer, the opt-out initial set up fee is $10 and $5/month for three years.
4. If you do not pay your smart meter opt-out fees, your utility company can send you a notice that you have not paid your bills in full and can send you a shut-off notice.

TURN’s advice was to contact SoCal Gas and inform them that as a CARE customer, he should not have to pay the $75 fee. However, because of the shut-off notice TURN recommended that he call the CPUC’s emergency complaint number and not try and talk to a customer service representative. After he called the CPUC’s 800 number he was transferred to a SoCal Gas manager who agreed to reduce his bill by $65.

TURN is unique in combining environmental concerns with bread-and-butter ones. We continued to support affordable renewable energy while winning substantial reductions in wasteful utility schemes.

$520 Million Saved: PG&E, seeking new markets, wanted to fund an experiment in adding more publicly available electric vehicle charging stations to the already crowded field. And they wanted customer funding to the tune of $650 million. Even after TURN’s team, staff attorney Elise Torres and energy analyst Eric Borden, won initial arguments at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), PG&E continued to press the scheme. TURN eventually convinced the Commission to cap the scheme at $130 million, and focus the program on underserved areas. But PG&E hasn’t given up; Torres and Borden are already at work challenging PG&E’s new demands for additional, experimental customer-funded programs.

Protecting Our Progress on Climate Change: Staff attorney Matt Freedman worked with a wide range of stakeholders to convince the Governor’s Office to table for further study a proposal to change the governance of the California Independent System Operator to create a Western Regional Transmission Operator. TURN has long-standing concerns about regionalization of our electric grid, which would give us less local control and potentially threaten our climate progress.

With the new administration in Washington rejecting the very notion of climate change, it is more important than ever to preserve California’s autonomy and commitment to renewable energy.

$231 Million Saved: TURN general counsel Bob Finkelstein spearheaded a strategic combination of litigation and negotiation to beat back an increase of $430 million proposed by Sempra, the parent corporation of SoCal Gas and SDG&E. Because the case sets rates for gas customers throughout southern California and electric rates for SDG&E for a three-year period, this means a substantial decrease in the burden on customers who are still reeling from Sempra’s mismanagement of the Aliso Canyon gas field.

$620 Million Saved: SoCal Gas customers would have been fleeced if the CPUC had allowed the utility to build a 60-mile natural gas pipeline between Adelanto and Moreno. Luckily, staff attorney Marcel Hawiger was able to show that the pipeline was unneeded and would not provide customer benefits commensurate with the costs. Siding with TURN, the CPUC rejected SoCal Gas’ unreasonable demand for consumers to pay for the unnecessary project.

CONSUMER TIPS:
Keeping Consumers Connected

Universal utility service is a necessity in our modern world, but deregulated phone rates and skyrocketing energy rates are leaving vulnerable customers behind. Utilities can afford to do more to help, and should.

Improved Energy Programs Benefit Consumers: Programs to aid vulnerable consumers should be easily accessible to eligible customers and provide top value not only to the direct recipients and but also to ratepayers broadly, since funding comes from rates. In key proceedings on CARE low-income energy rates and energy efficiency programs, TURN staff attorney Hayley Goodson won reductions in utility administrative expenses, streamlined eligibility and higher standards for measuring program cost-effectiveness.

Safety and Accountability at the Forefront in 2017

Utility mistakes can have tragic results, from phone outages to gas explosions. Consumers have learned we can’t put blind trust in greedy utilities. Instead we have to demand that the CPUC hold utilities and other energy service providers to the highest possible standards, and put a stop to dangerous practices like shut-offs.

Prioritizing Safety: Ever since the tragic San Bruno explosion, TURN has taken a lead role in getting the utilities to do a better job of analyzing their safety risks and demonstrating that they’re focusing ratepayer dollars on projects that will produce the biggest safety benefits. TURN legal director Tom Long won a key victory when the CPUC agreed with TURN that utilities must prioritize their spending based on cost effectiveness and adopted TURN’s methodology for measuring the benefits from reduced safety risk, one that will inform key CPUC decisions in the future.

Holding Marketers Accountable: Many consumers, including TURN’s own executive director, have encountered the dubious and confusing marketing claims of gas companies competing with regulated utilities for residential customers. Complaints from TURN members have made it clear that new rules are needed to make sure marketers identify themselves as such, and are not luring consumers with inflated claims about the savings they can offer. Staff attorney Nina Suetake, who recently returned to TURN after a brief hiatus, is bringing their concerns to the CPUC along with demands for new, stronger consumer protections including clearer disclosures.

Utility Shut-Offs are a Public Safety Issue: Thanks to grant funding, TURN is working with partner organizations statewide to map and identify patterns in disconnections and their health impacts. With TURN’s new research director Gabriela Sandoval at the helm, the project has gotten started very quickly. While gathering data, TURN held seven successful Know Your Rights / Utility Justice trainings in Fresno, Long Beach, Oakland, San Bernardino, San Diego and Stockton, as well as other trainings on shut-offs and the Medical Baseline Discount Program; trainees included representatives from public health departments, school districts, faith-based organizations, and advocates for legal, housing, and immigrant rights. The project will continue into 2017.

A Voice for You and a Voice for Consumer Concerns

TURN’s organizing director and consumer advisor Ana Montes started off the year in great company, participating in a National Twitter Town Hall on closing the digital divide hosted by comedian W. Kamau Bell and featuring FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn and Senator Cory Booker. By the end of the year Montes had numerous additional presentations under her belt, including high-level Washington DC Congressional and FCC briefings. As TURN’s consumer advisor she also plays a key role in training local advocates to assist consumers facing shut-offs, and in responding to the more than 1,000 complaints received in 2016 from TURN members and supporters.

TURN continued to put your concerns and interests front and center in newspaper, radio and television news and through our growing social media presence. Communications director Mindy Spatt fielded over 300 media calls, bringing statewide and national attention to the key issues of gas safety, universal phone access and utility affordability. She also delivered all the latest news to our members through our print newsletter and online alerts and postings.

Thanks to Our Funders

Under the leadership of development director Kendra Lewis, TURN has stepped up our fundraising efforts to great success. In 2016, TURN was grateful to receive funding from the California Endowment, the Energy Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, the Rose Foundation, the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, and The Center for Media Justice. Their generosity has helped us move key policy initiatives including reducing shut-offs and protecting California’s progress on climate change. TURN is also grateful to Daniel Mogin of the Mogin Law Firm for selecting us as a recipient of a Cy Press award.
LETTERS TO TURN

Thank you for the refund I got from PG&E. Thank you for your hard work.
— J. Suer

Dear Turn,

I would like to let you know that your staff must be TURN at work!

She informed me as to how I could become a TURN, director of AT&T to get their power restored.

Every month, you see the results of our work in turn, building a more fair system.

TURN regrets that we don’t have the space to thank all our donors individually, because we are so grateful for your support.

— Edith Taylor

TURN appreciates each and every donation we receive, not just because it helps fund our consumer advocacy and assistance, but also because we know your donations are a vote of confidence.

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