Donald Trump’s FCC appointees have gutted the hard-won regulations that require nondiscriminatory Internet access. But California can still demand that companies doing business here — and raking in huge profits — comply with basic consumer protections.

Without oversight, Internet providers would be able to create expensive fast lanes for their preferred content while relegating less profitable content — and consumers — to slow lanes.

Internet Service Providers should not be permitted to act as “gatekeepers” choosing which content and which users get special, speedier access. We need a free and open Internet — that’s why TURN is supporting State Senate leader Kevin de León’s SB 460. Our state lawmakers must make sure California consumers don’t get stuck in the slow lane! You can tell them you agree by taking action at www.turn.org.

**Breaking News:** Another bill to protect net free access to the Internet has been introduced! TURN also supports SB 822 (Wiener, D-San Francisco)!

Left: TURN 2017 Consumer Champion Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) is the author of SB 460, the California Internet Consumer Protection and Net Neutrality Act of 2018.
Message from TURN’s Executive Director

LET’S HOLD CORPORATIONS ACCOUNTABLE

S aving you money on your monthly bills has always been at the core of TURN’s work. This year, TURN continued to rack up billions in savings for California consumers, defeating several unfair and unjustified utility schemes that would have raised your rates substantially.

Holding corporations accountable is also a key part of TURN’s mission. This year TURN’s staff succeeded in doing this in so many cases that we couldn’t include them all in the Annual Report, so I wanted to share a few of my personal favorites with you.

TURN Stood Up to AT&T’s Persistent Bullying

AT&T is still trying to bully TURN for our role in stopping its $39 billion takeover of T-Mobile in 2011. TURN organized hundreds of people across the state to attend CPUC public hearings to oppose AT&T’s acquisition of T-Mobile because our experience shows that mega-mergers deliver very few benefits to consumers. In retaliation, AT&T has spent years fighting to reverse the CPUC’s well-reasoned decision awarding TURN compensation for our work representing California telephone customers in the merger case.

General counsel Bob Finkelstein, in addition to his leadership in fighting Southern California utility rate hikes, has represented TURN in the State Court of Appeals several times, standing up to a high-priced team of AT&T corporate sharks who are willing to invest countless resources in bullying and intimidating TURN.

Empty Promises from Gas Companies

Dozens of TURN members contacted us in 2017 to complain about phony promises and hard-sell marketing tactics by companies known as Core Transport Agents (CTAs) that are trying to compete with utility companies to provide natural gas to residential consumers. These third-party gas providers, such as Vista Energy Marketing, Tiger Natural Gas, and Spark Energy Gas, attract customers with promises of huge monthly savings that don’t always materialize.

Natural gas prices are volatile, and these alternate companies will only provide the gas itself — customers are still subject to utility rate hikes for gas transportation and distribution.

Our newest staff attorney, David Cheng, based in our San Diego office, working with organizing director Ana Montes, has taken the lead in developing policy recommendations to the CPUC to put a stop to deceptive marketing claims that promise people lower monthly bills without any commitment to keeping those promises. In fact, many consumers have complained to TURN that their gas bills are higher than ever. If the CPUC fails to adopt key TURN recommendations, we will bring the issue to the Legislature.

Deceptive AT&T Notices STOPPED

Last summer, we received dozens of complaints from upset TURN members about notices from AT&T that suggested their landline service was being discontinued. San Diego managing attorney Christine Mailloux was concerned that these notices were designed to trick customers into giving up their landlines when they had the right to keep them — a right TURN has vigorously defended.

Mailloux contacted the CPUC and demanded a stop to AT&T’s deceptive notices that threatened to disconnect service unless customers switched their landline phones to digital services. Better yet, she convinced the CPUC to make AT&T send out new notices clarifying to customers that they did not need to change phone service, and that they could be switched back to landline service at no charge.

More Sunshine for Solar Sales

TURN heard from several members that after leasing solar panels the savings they’d been promised by marketers didn’t materialize. Purchasers of solar panels have also complained that their bills did not go down as much as they expected.

Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez-Fletcher (D-San Diego) heard similar complaints from her constituents and contacted TURN for policy advice. Staff attorney Elise Torres helped her craft AB 1070, the Solar Customer Bill of Rights. Sponsored by TURN, and adopted in 2017, AB 1070 requires companies to provide consumers with a standard disclosure document before they purchase, lease or finance a solar energy system. The bill also makes the Department of Consumer Affairs responsible for resolving complaints against solar companies and for overseeing residential rooftop solar energy providers so that a process is in place to resolve consumer disputes in this emerging industry.

Remember, you can help us celebrate all of these victories and much more at our 45th Anniversary gala in San Francisco in May. Details are on the back cover.
Understanding Time-of-Use Rates

Dear Consumer Advisor,

I recently saw TURN executive director Mark Toney on TV warning about punishment pricing being instituted by PG&E. I didn’t understand exactly when this would be started, or why, but I know I do not want to be punished with higher bills. Should I be worried?

Sincerely
Ann Xious

Dear Ann,

Mark was talking about time-of-use (TOU) rates, in which the price you pay for electricity varies according to the time of day. Higher prices are charged during peak hours and lower prices are charged during off-peak hours. Rates are also typically higher in summer months than in winter months.

TURN’s analysis shows that large users will benefit the most from TOU rates, and customers who use less could end up paying more. Despite TURN’s objections, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) wants utilities to implement these rates statewide.

Pacific Gas & Electric, SDG&E and Edison will be moving all of their customers to TOU rates by 2020, so most people have nothing to worry about yet. But if you are one of the customers chosen for upcoming “pilot projects,” your bill could be changing much sooner. The good news is, thanks to TURN, you will have the option of opting out of the pilot and choosing either the old, tiered rate system or a different rate, without any additional charges.

You Can Opt-Out
If you are selected to participate in a time-of-use pilot program, and don’t want to, you have the option of opting out of the pilot and choosing either the old, tiered rate system or a different rate, without any additional charges.

You Can Try TOU Rates Risk Free!
Bill protections won by TURN can be taken advantage of for up to one year. Your utility company should do a bill comparison and refund you the difference if, after 12 months, you’ve ended up paying higher bills under TOU than you would have under the old, tiered rates. But it never hurts to be proactive and call and ask for the analysis. Customers who opt out before 12 months will likewise be entitled to an analysis at that time and if entitled to refunds will receive them in the following month.

Is a Time-of-Use Plan the Best Plan for Me?
Customers who use very little electricity, or those who are mostly at home and using appliances or air conditioning during the peak hours of 4 pm to 9 pm may see higher bills, especially in those in hotter climates. Those who are able to adjust their usage because they are not at home at that time, or have the flexibility to use some of the strategies below, might find these rates advantageous.

PG&E, Edison and SDG&E have rate plan comparison tools on their websites that consumers can utilize to compare their bills under both tiered and TOU plans. If you have questions, customer service should be able to help.

Speak Out Now!
Remember, if you have complaints about hard-to-understand marketing materials, higher bills, confusing information, or inadequate customer service, you can let the CPUC know through filing a complaint at www.turn.org, or contacting the Commission directly.

The CPUC has ordered utilities to switch the rates, and needs to hear about any problems customers experience during these pilots in order to improve the programs before switching all customers in 2020. The good news is that when that does happen, the bill protections won by TURN will remain in place at least for the first year, and customers will always have the choice to opt out.

WANT TO TRY TO SAVE WITH TOU?
You’ll need to avoid using electricity between the peak hours of 4-9 pm as much as possible. Here are some strategies.

- Turn on your air conditioners in the morning to pre-cool your house and switch them off later in the day.
- Put your laptops, tablets, and computers to sleep when not needed or run them on battery and charge overnight.
- Run your washer, dryer, or dishwasher later in the evening, in the morning, or on weekends. A timer could be useful.
- If you have an EV (electric vehicle) charge it overnight.

Check out the new FAQs on our website. Everything you ever wanted to know about gas, electric and phone service is at: www.turn.org/telecom-faq/ and www.turn.org/energy-faq/. 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.
TURN spearheaded a series of groundbreaking reforms in California policy in 2017, successfully winning new protections for victims of wildfires, medically vulnerable consumers and rural phone customers. These victories were hard won and required advocacy in the legislature, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the media and in the streets. TURN staff worked together to push though needed safeguards as the affordability gap widened and wildfires wreaked havoc in many communities.

TURN also joined advocates and policymakers in California and across the US to fight back against the Trump administration’s cutbacks in climate protections, net neutrality and low-income assistance. Consumers’ bills were protected as well, as TURN challenged inflated utility proposals to overcharge customers for everything from experimental electric vehicle charging stations to new computers. As PG&E moves toward the closure of its long-time cash cow Diablo Canyon, TURN had to stop yet another attempt to bilk customers for inflated costs, this time for nuclear decommissioning. It’s no surprise that PG&E would still be trying to milk Diablo, its been doing that for almost as many years as TURN has been around, for every last dollar they can get. And it’s no surprise that TURN would object — and win.
BILLIONS IN SAVINGS
In our 45 years of consumer advocacy TURN has saved consumers over $10 billion.

Diablo Decommissioning Slashed by Over $1 Billion

After PG&E finally agreed to close the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant, it still wanted to overcharge consumers for decommissioning and other costs. TURN objected to PG&E’s demands for customers to pay an increase of over $1 billion for decommissioning Diablo — on top of over $2 billion already collected.

TURN staff attorney Matt Freedman argued that such an unprecedented increase, the largest ever proposed by a California utility, was unsupportable, challenging the weak justifications presented by PG&E for the higher bills being proposed. After a CPUC judge agreed with Freedman, PG&E used its tried and true tactic of lobbying Commissioners behind closed doors for a different outcome. TURN was able to fight back against PG&E’s attempts to derail the decision in the media and at the CPUC. Consumers ended up as winners this time, as the Commission agreed with TURN and rejected $1.358 billion (or 91%) of the proposed increase, avoiding over $100 million in annual rate increases.

TURN wins justice for people and the planet by keeping essential services affordable and advancing groundbreaking consumer protections.

 eléctricos de todos los días.

TURN's team of staff attorney Marcel Hawiger and energy analyst Eric Borden leveraged TURN's expertise to identify ways to prevent excessive incentive payments to utilities and limit expensive pilot projects. TURN also won several new accountability mechanisms, including procedures to stop utilities from “double-counting” of DERs, so that customers are only charged for resources that are necessary and used. In addition, strict cost effectiveness criteria will require Edison and SDG&E to buy DERs that are less expensive than traditional resources, not more so, fulfilling the promise of clean, green and affordable energy for the consumers who pay for it.
Emergency Consumer Protections for Wildfire Victims

Quick action by TURN’s Hayley Goodson averted disconnections and other utility-related problems for victims of the October and December California wildfires.

Goodson urged the CPUC to adopt emergency measures to assist residential utility customers affected by the wildfires.

TURN proposed consumer protections for energy, water, and telecommunications services, including deposit and late fee waivers, suspension of disconnections and more generous payment plans. TURN also successfully advocated that in order for assistance be available to all customers, utilities should accept forms of documentation that are not dependent on immigration status.

The Commission agreed to adopt all of the emergency consumer protections urged by TURN, and extended them to southern California wildfire victims in January 2018. These protections will go a long way toward making sure that establishing or re-establishing utility services will not create additional challenges for customers already reeling from the impact of wildfires.

Holding utility companies accountable to the public.

Informing Consumers and Elevating Their Concerns

The media is one of the tools TURN uses to elevate consumers’ voices and concerns. That was the case when the CPUC held a meeting in Davis during a winter cold spell and was greeted by angry consumers who had seen sharp increases in their home heating bills and a phalanx of TV cameras. Under the leadership of communications director Mindy Spatt, TURN staff was quoted in over 800 print and electronic news articles. With increased media attention on California due to unprecedented wildfires and legislative efforts to cede state control to federal authorities, TURN was frequently front and center in major national coverage, and continued to be the preeminent voice on utility consumer issues in California.

Spatt is also responsible for your monthly newsletters and email updates, and TURN’s website and Facebook and Twitter posts. This year saw TURN’s online communications channels grow across the board, with more consumers than ever before joining the fight for affordable and accessible essential services, net neutrality, and new consumer protections.

Sunshine! Public Access to Information Expanded

The scandals of the Peevey era led to renewed scrutiny of the CPUC’s cozy relation with utility companies, and several initiatives by TURN and other advocates to shut back door channels and increase transparency, including improved public access to safety records and other information.

The Commission collects information about utility safety and reliability, including the results of audits and operational oversight. But when journalists or members of the public seek that information, the utilities have taken advantage of rules that allow them to claim confidentiality without any proof whatsoever. That determination, from the company itself, has been the basis for the Commission’s refusal to release information sought by journalists and other public representatives through public records act requests.

TURN’s legal director Thomas Long joined other advocates to demand more rigorous review and more transparency, which PG&E, Sempra and Edison, as well as the large telecom companies like AT&T and Verizon, strenuously objected to, since they did not want to lose their free pass. Our efforts paid off when the Commission agreed to hold utility companies to higher standards when they want information withheld under claims of confidentiality. Absent an actual showing of the need for confidentiality, the information will be released to the public on request. The result should be a much-needed increase in sunshine regarding the information that shapes the CPUC’s policies and regulations for both energy and telecom companies.

TURN advocates for sunshine and calls corporations out in the media when they try to make back door deals or use their influence to skirt the rules.

Protecting Public Safety.

Demanding That Phone Companies Provide Reliable Service and Top Notch 911 Everywhere

The wildfires that have plagued California in the last several months revealed just how important phone communications systems still are. TURN staff attorney Ashley Salas has quickly jumped into a leading role in TURN’s longstanding efforts to get the CPUC to pay closer attention to the crucial need for reliable emergency communications. In the wake of the sale of Verizon’s landline network to Frontier, hundreds of customers experienced outages of several hours to multiple days, warranting further scrutiny by the CPUC. Salas urged the Commission to address inadequate outage reporting and the consumer impacts of repeated call failures.

The Commission found that poor customer service, improper training, and poor coordination between Verizon and AT&T had resulted in widespread outages and significant customer harm. In addition, TURN’s concerns regarding problems with improperly maintained poles, loose and hanging wires and other deficiencies in network facilities were associated with poor, intermittent, or nonexistent service. Further investigation into these issues can lead to ensuring that rural communities don’t get left behind, and that telecom companies can’t just get away with providing bad customer service!
TURN believes no one should be cut off from essential services. We partner with local community organizations to provide training and assistance to help consumers keep their lights on, and reduce the number and duration of shutoffs statewide.

The Internet is essential too!

TURN knows all too well that when two behemoths in the telecommunication industry move to merge, the benefits promised to customers often don’t materialize — while corporate profits usually do. Level 3 and CenturyLink are not household names in California, but represent a sizable share of the market for wholesale telecommunications and broadband services throughout the state. That meant their proposed merger could have long-term impacts on California’s vast telecommunications network.

TURN managing attorney Christine Mailloux worked very closely with The Greenlining Institute and the CPUC’s Office of Ratepayer Advocates to bring this far-reaching transaction to the Commission for a full review. The consumer groups eventually reached a settlement with the companies that will bring benefits to communities that currently have inadequate Internet access, protect employees, improve outage reporting, and maintain stability in wholesale contracts. TURN will continue to monitor the deployment of new facilities to underserved areas of the state, so that our state’s long-standing promise of universal phone service is extended to include newer but equally essential Internet access.

Defending and Expanding Consumer Rights

In 2017, TURN succeeded in creating new, robust protections for California’s most vulnerable populations. The year started out with our first “End Shutoffs!” day in Sacramento. Advocates from our nine statewide partner groups met with their representatives to urge legislative action that eventually became Senate Bill 598 (Hueso, D-San Diego), the Shutoffs Reduction Act, which was signed into law by Gov. Brown on September 28.

TURN also fights shutoffs on the ground, with TURN research director Gabriela Sandoval, and TURN organizing director Ana Montes hosting five Shutoffs trainings all across California. These trainings teach grassroots organizers, and community leaders how to assist their clients to avoid shutoffs or, in the worst-case scenario, get their lights turned back on after being shut off.

Many consumers facing those situations were helped directly by TURN’s consumer advice staff Ana Montes and Malavika Rao. Montes and Rao also heard from TURN members about a multitude of gnarly problems, answering their questions and steering them toward discounts and savings, altogether responding to 800 consumer queries.

TURN’s outreach team also advanced the fight for fair rates, corporate accountability, and consumer rights through organizing TURN members and allies to speak out at CPUC community meetings and public hearings, greatly expanding our impact in diverse communities throughout the Golden State.

Fighting Back Against Anti-Consumer Moves at the FCC.

The fight for an affordable, accessible, and open Internet was set ablaze in 2017, as the FCC, led by Trump appointee Ajit Pai, adopted an order overturning hard-won net neutrality rules. TURN joined our allies in speaking out against the abandonment of Net Neutrality, and the devastating impact it would have on consumers, leaving phone companies free to create fast lanes and slow lanes with discriminatory, pay-to-play access. TURN telecommunication director Regina Costa advocated for California Assembly Joint Resolution No. 7 (Mullin, D-South San Francisco) urging Congress and the President to support open Internet access, the federal Lifeline program and discounted Internet access services for schools and libraries. The measure stands as a precursor to the new state efforts in 2018 to protect California consumers from the FCC’s wrong-headed action (see page 1 for more).

Costa is also leading the charge for federal consumer protections in other areas. As chair of the Telecom Committee of NASUCA (National Association of Utility Consumer Advocates) Costa brings TURN’s expertise and dedication to the national arena, challenging the FCC’s Lifeline cutbacks, addressing the impact of deteriorating copper networks and access to emergency services, and spearheading the national consumer coalition’s opposition to the elimination of net neutrality.
YOUR SUPPORT, AND FOUNDATION SUPPORT, ARE CRUCIAL

Thanks to development director Kendra Noel Lewis, TURN has expanded its monthly giving and legacy giving programs and foundation support. The California Endowment grant has provided major funding for TURN’s statewide No Shutoffs campaign and the partnerships we are building with local health agencies in vulnerable communities. We are also grateful to the Sierra Health Foundation for its support of the No Shutoffs campaign in the San Joaquin Valley.

In addition, the Energy Foundation has provided generous support for several key policy initiatives to make sure clean green energy is also affordable, and to advocate for policies consistent with California’s climate protection and greenhouse gas reduction goals.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Playing a Key Role

TURN’s administrative team of Senior Legal Assistant Haley de Genova and Finance and Administrative Associate Anthony Hoey, lead by CFO Richard Perez, prepared over 252 legal filings. They are also the responsible for processing your donations, answering your calls and keeping the office running smoothly, and they play a key role in every single one of our successes.

TURN FINANCIAL CHARTS 2016-17
THANK YOU

FROM ALL OF US AT TURN

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Speak Up! Champions are members who make a monthly commitment to stand up for every California resident who pays an electric, gas or phone bill. Their outstanding support means that the consumer voice is heard at the CPUC, the State Capitol and wherever decisions are made concerning safe and reliable service at fair rates, consumer protections and corporate accountability.

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Become a Monthly Sustainer

2018 is going to be a very special year for TURN as we celebrate 45 years of consumer advocacy and the 100th anniversary of our founder Sylvia Siegel’s birth. Please use the attached envelope to send a special donation to honor Sylvia and help us keep winning more of the consumer protections you and everyone else in California need.

Remember, the best way to make a long-term commitment to ratepayer justice and consumer rights is by checking the box to become a monthly sustainer! Your support is crucial to our continued success.

SAVE THE DATE

PLEASE JOIN TURN FOR OUR 45th Anniversary Celebration!

We hope you will join us to celebrate the Sylvia Siegel Champions, our Grassroots Champions and 45 Years of Protecting Pocketbooks and Planet with TURN

THURSDAY, MAY 17TH

6:00pm—9:00pm

Julia Morgan Ballroom

465 California Street • San Francisco • California • 94104

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Dinner, Cash Bar, Entertainment & Awards Presentation
(Fair Market Value $120/ticket)

$300 General Public

$150 Nonprofit, Goverment, TURN members