

Opening Remarks of CPUC President Batjer at Emergency Meeting to Hear From PG&E re: PSPS

Oct. 18, 2019, 1 p.m., San Francisco

First, I would like to thank my fellow commissioners and all in attendance for making today's emergency meeting on short notice.

Just this past week we recognized the two-year anniversary of the Tubbs Fire in Napa and Sonoma Counties (October 8, 2017). Twenty-two people lost their lives and more than 5,600 structures were destroyed. And in just a few weeks from now, we'll mark the one-year anniversary of the Camp Fire in Butte County (November 8, 2018)—the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California's history. 86 people tragically lost their lives and a staggering 18,804 structures were destroyed. Many of us in this room have a personal connection to these destructive wildfires. And we will always recognize the tremendous loss of friends, family and loved ones. This brings us to today where we're at the historic peak of the wildfire season and time is of the essence.

I called today's emergency meeting, and required the presence of executives and board members from Pacific Gas & Electric, in an effort to ensure all CPUC-regulated utilities are better prepared—and that their customers are better served—when our state faces the next wildfire threat and, if warranted, another power shutoff incident.

California has been a global leader in implementing laws to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change. It has also been a leader in supporting climate research which has forecasted increasing threats and impacts from wildfires in the coming decades. And, sadly, the State has learned too well in recent years the level of destruction climate change-induced weather events can have on our communities when combined with negligent maintenance of electrical infrastructure. California will become more resilient, but resilience will not and should never translate to Californians being willing to put up with inadequate execution of measures that are supposed to keep them safe.

And for the CPUC, although utilities are responsible for keeping their infrastructure safe, we cannot and should never stop demanding better ways to reduce wildfire risk and to reduce the use, scope and impacts of a power shutoff without compromising public safety.

What we saw play out by PG&E last week cannot be repeated.

I've only been at the CPUC for two months, but it does not take long to see the privilege investor-owned utilities have in being a unique provider of essential services to the public. It also has not taken me long to realize how some utilities fail to understand what a privilege it is and that with such privilege comes great responsibility to those you serve.

It is the CPUC's responsibility, therefore, to identify and correct such failures. That is why we are here today.

My specific goal for this meeting is to make sure any future power shutoff event is nothing like last week's.

In the past year, the CPUC adopted a Wildfire Mitigation Plan for PG&E and protocols for power shutoffs, and continues to examine current practices from each power shutoff event. The utilities' plans for these events, however, are only effective when they are implemented in a reasonable and competent manner. This did not happen last week.

What we will question and assess today is the scope and scale of the last week's power shutoff event. And, equally important, its inadequate execution by PG&E.

The impact of the scope and scale of the power shutoff to lives, businesses and the economy cannot be overstated. The loss of power endangers lives, especially those individuals who are reliant on power for medical reasons. It also imposes additional burdens on our most vulnerable populations. And it causes major disruptions to businesses, hospitals, schools, and transportation networks, as well as strains state and local emergency and public safety resources.

To exacerbate the situation, PG&E was not fully prepared to manage such a large-scale power shutoff. Throughout the event, PG&E had multiple issues with communication, coordination, and event and resource management.

Among various problems identified, we witnessed PG&E not adequately prepare or scale its business operations for the increase in customers contacting the utility during the power shutoff events. Including the crashing of its website and its inability to answer the calls of customers seeking assistance and critical information.

We have also heard from local and tribal governments on the lack of coordination until the power shutoffs commenced, the lack of critical information flow and, in some instances, breakdowns in communication.

The CPUC acknowledges PG&E staff cooperated with state agencies and were transparent with problems as they arose. Such collaboration is imperative in emergency

situations and must continue in the future. This level of cooperation also needs to be inclusive of all emergency response personnel impacted by these events, particularly county and tribal governments.

We also acknowledge the contributions of frontline utility workers. They face risks themselves as they work long hours, often in rough terrain, to notify customers in remote areas, monitor the system during shutoff events, and restore service as quickly as possible afterwards.

However, failures in execution, combined with the magnitude of this event, created an unacceptable situation that should never be repeated and that requires scrutiny and correction. While PG&E spent significant resources warning the public about the risks of the power shutoff events and what the public should do to prepare for an event, it is not clear that PG&E spent the time it should to make sure the utility was prepared.

Today we focus on what we can learn to ensure there is significant improvement in determining the need and, if required, the execution of any future power shutoff events initiated by PG&E.

With that, I would like to request Mr. Johnson introduce himself and provide his opening statement.