The Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility has retained veteran energy policy leader John Geesman as legal counsel in their proceedings before the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

Geesman’s long career in energy policy includes a term as executive director of the California Energy Commission (CEC) during Jerry Brown’s first term as governor, serving as a commissioner on the CEC and chair of the California Power Exchange. He was a prominent opponent of PG&E’s Proposition 16, which went down to defeat in 2010 (see Geesman’s article “Peter Darbee’s Dog of an Initiative” in the April 2010 Santa Lucia).

The Alliance is intervening in PG&E’s request for $64 million in ratepayer funding for seismic studies at Diablo Canyon—an increase of $47 million over their initial proposal. Questions have been raised regarding not only the cost but the merits of the scope of the study. “The fact that the CPUC staff could recently rubber-stamp Southern California Edison’s proposed seismic studies for the San Onofre nuclear plant without review by any seismic experts says what we’re up against,” said Geesman.

The CPUC has failed to hire a single seismologist, even though it was directed to independently review Diablo Canyon and San Onofre seismic studies before seeking license renewal. The concerns that arose in the wake of the San Bruno gas explosion and revelations about the CPUC and PG&E’s negligent oversight are justifiably magnified when addressing California’s aging—and seismically vulnerable—nuclear reactors. “San Bruno was tragic,” said Alliance outreach coordinator David Weisman, “San Bruno plus radiation would be catastrophic.”

On January 23, the CPUC’s Independent Peer Review Panel held its first “public” meeting, with less than ten days notice. It was obvious to all in the room that PG&E was running the meeting. Geesman attended the hoopla, and afterward fired off a letter to CPUC Executive Director Paul Clements detailing the severe deficiencies he’d witnessed there, noting CPUC staff’s obvious unfamiliarity with the requirements of the Bagley-Keehn Open Meetings Act and that “their failure to properly advise the IPP members thereof requires immediate corrections.”

Geesman finds a worthy ally in the Alliance. “More than any other organizations working on nuclear issues, ANR is focused on forcing the California government to do its job,” he said. “I want to help them do that.”

Rochelle Becker, executive director of the Alliance and chair of the Santa Lucia Chapter’s Diablo Canyon Task Force, is equally enthusiastic about the partnership, saying, “Nobody finds the dry rot in our regulatory system more effectively than John Geesman, and it is an honor to have him represent us.”

Testimony and hearings for PG&E’s seismic funding case at the CPUC get under way this month.