

# Nuclear Watchdog Grows More Teeth

John Geesman to lead Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility's legal intervention at CPUC seismic hearings



**Woof!** The Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility's Rochelle Becker and David Weisman at a California Public Utilities Commission hearing.

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 Lucian*).

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 shows 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 haphazard meeting and afterward fired off a letter to CPUC Executive Director Paul Clennon detailing the severe deficiencies he'd witnessed there, noting CPUC staff's obvious unfamiliarity with the requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act and that "their failure to properly advise the IPRP members thereof requires immediate correction."

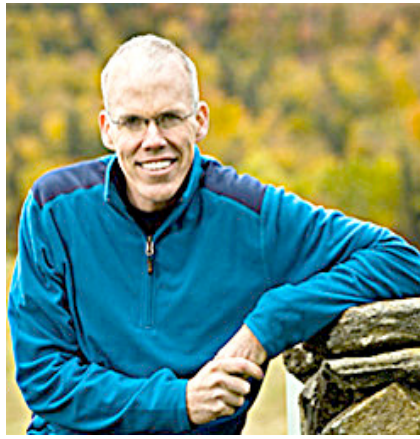
Geesman finds a worthy ally in the Alliance. "More than any other organizations working on nuclear issues, A4NR is focused on forcing the California government to do its job," he said. "I want to help them do that."

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.



**On point** Geesman.



## Time to Stop Being Cynical About Corporate Money in Politics and Start Being Angry

By Bill McKibben

TomDispatch.com, January 7, 2012

*As he showed with the ongoing dispute over the Keystone XL pipeline, when he sets his mind to it, Bill McKibben has a way of making us take another look at the previously accepted and acceptable.*

My resolution for 2012 is to be naïve — dangerously naïve.

I'm aware that the usual recipe for political effectiveness is just the opposite: to be cynical, calculating, an insider. But if you think, as I do, that we need deep change in this country, then cynicism is a sucker's bet. Try as hard as you can, you're never going to be as cynical as the corporations and the harem of politicians they pay for. It's like trying to outchant a Buddhist monastery.

Here's my case in point, one of a thousand stories people working for social change could tell: All last fall, most of the environmental movement, including 350.org, the group I helped found, waged a fight against the planned Keystone XL pipeline that would bring some of the dirtiest energy on the planet from Canada through the U.S. to the Gulf Coast. We waged our struggle against building it out in the open, presenting scientific argument, holding demonstrations, and attending hearings. We sent 1,253 people to jail in the largest civil disobedience action in a generation. Meanwhile, more than half a million Americans offered public comments against the pipeline, the most on any energy project in the nation's history.

And what do you know? We won a small victory in November, when President Obama agreed that, before he could give the project a thumbs-up or -down, it needed another year of careful review. (The previous version of that review, as overseen by the State Department, had been little short of a crony capitalist farce.) Given that James Hansen, the government's premier climate scientist, had said that tapping Canada's tar sands for that pipeline would, in the end, essentially mean "game over for the climate," that seemed an eminently reasonable course to follow, even if it was also eminently political.

A few weeks later, however, Congress decided it wanted to take up the question. In the process, the issue went from out in the open to behind closed doors in money-filled rooms. Within days, and after only a couple of hours of hearings that barely mentioned the key scientific questions or the dangers involved, the House of Representatives voted 234-194 to force a quicker review of the pipeline. Later, the House attached its demand to the must-pass payroll tax cut.

That was an obvious pre-election year attempt to put the president on the spot. Environmentalists are at least hopeful that the White House will now reject the permit. After all, its communications director said that the rider, by hurrying the decision, "virtually guarantees that the pipeline will not be approved."

As important as the vote total in the House, however, was another number: within minutes of the vote, Oil Change International had calculated that the 234 Congressional representatives who voted aye had received \$42 million in campaign contributions from the fossil-fuel industry; the 193 nays, \$8 million.

### Buying Congress

I know that cynics — call them realists, if you prefer — will be completely unsurprised by that. Which is precisely the problem.

We've reached the point where we're unfazed by things that should shake us to the core. So, just for a moment, be naïve and consider what really happened in that vote: the people's representatives who happen to have taken the bulk of the money from those energy companies promptly voted on behalf of their interests.

They weren't weighing science or the national interest; they weren't balancing present benefits against future costs. Instead of doing the work of legislators, that is, they were acting like employees. Forget the idea that they're public servants; the truth is that, in every way that matters, they work for Exxon and its kin. They should, by rights, wear logos on their lapels like NASCAR drivers.

If you find this too harsh, think about how obligated you feel when someone gives you something. Did you get a Christmas present last month from someone you hadn't remembered to buy one for? Are you going to send them an extra-special one next year?

And that's for a pair of socks. Speaker of the House John Boehner, who insisted that the Keystone approval decision be speeded up, has gotten \$1,111,080 from the fossil-fuel industry during his tenure. His Senate counterpart Mitch McConnell, who shepherded the bill through his chamber, has raked in \$1,277,208 in the course of his tenure in Washington.

If someone had helped your career to the tune of a million dollars, wouldn't you feel in their debt? I would. I get somewhat less than that from my employer, Middlebury College, and yet I bleed Panther blue. Don't ask me to compare my school with, say, Dartmouth unless you want a biased answer, because that's what you'll get. Which is fine — I am an employee.

But you'd be a fool to let me referee the homecoming football game. In fact, in any other walk of life we wouldn't think twice before concluding that paying off the referees is wrong. If the Patriots make the Super Bowl, everyone in America would be outraged to see owner Robert Kraft trot out to midfield before the game and hand a \$1,000 bill to each of the linesmen and field judges. If he did it secretly, the newspaper reporter who uncovered the scandal would win a Pulitzer. But a political reporter who bothered to point out

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