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To Record Searchlight editors:

I want to applaud the people and politicians of Shasta County for passing an ordinance designed to regulate large power line projects. These projects damage and degrade one of the Northstate's most important resources – our outstanding scenery. Here are some additional reasons why these massive new transmission lines are an unnecessary mistake:

High voltages are needed to carry power over long distances. But these high voltage power lines loose a significant amount of power during transmission. In 1995 it was estimated that 7.2% of the power generated in the US was lost during transmission. That's a lot of power. The longer a power line runs, the greater the loss of power.

Massive new power transmission lines are only needed because our government has decided to favor large, centralized power generation over what is known as d*istributed power generation.* Distributed power generation means making electricity as near as possible to where the electricity will be consumed. This is the type of power generation which Thomas Edison favored. Unfortunately, the captains of industry recognized that they could make more money and exercise market control through centralized power generation. That is the path America has followed. It has resulted in blackouts, monopoly control of power generation and massive vulnerability to terrorist sabotage.

There is an alternative. In Germany the government financed projects which have placed solar panels on virtually all public buildings. If the feds did that here, our counties, schools and libraries would not be so cash strapped.

Unfortunately, the rules in the US are even stacked against those who develop distributed power generation on their own, i.e. without government financing. Those rules do not require power companies to buy excess power from individual power producers at fair, competitive rates. Washington Congressman Jay Inslee has introduced a bill to remedy that (see: http://solveclimate.com/blog/20100729/rep-inslee-proposes-shared-fee-electric-bills-clean-energy). But don't hold your breath waiting for the bill to pass; Big Energy's contributions to those who run key congressional committees will likely keep that bill from ever reaching the floor of the House…much less the Senate. It would take massive citizen action – for example counties all across the country passing ordinances like Shasta County's - to break the strangle hold of Big Energy on Congress.

Even the big environmental groups have embraced centralized power generation. The Sierra Club, for example, claims that it would take too long to transition to renewable energy if we were to rely primarily on distributed power generation. The big e-groups pay lip service to distributed power generation but they are not pushing hard to make it a feasible reality by, for example, promoting legislation to do here what was done in Germany.

The situation appears bleak and likely folks all across the West will have to fight like hell to keep massive new power transmission lines out of their back yards. But don't underestimate the power of the people. If we all make up our minds we can still turn the government around.

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