

It's Complicated

By Sierra Club California



The Great Wall Newsom doesn't always play well with environmentalists.

Photo by gov.ca.gov

In 2023, Governor Newsom embarked on the first year of his second term with an energy we've come to expect. He took some positive actions, like the state's lawsuit against big oil, and some frustrating ones detailed below. So as always, his overall score is more nuanced than mere numbers can convey.

Out of the 14 bills Sierra Club California scored this year, only 7 reached Governor Newsom's desk. Of these 7 bills, we supported all, and we're glad to say he signed every single one. If we graded the Governor solely on this, he would receive a perfect 100%.

A broader analysis of the Governor's performance offers a less sterling evaluation. Sierra Club California supported a total of 65 bills that landed on Governor Newsom's desk in 2023. He signed 49 and vetoed 16, including three from Sierra Club California's 2023 Priority Bill List. Meanwhile, only one bill we opposed made it to the Governor's desk, and he signed that bill. Taking these statistics into account, his actions aligned with the Sierra Club position approximately 73% of the time.

But it's essential to consider his actions beyond bills when evaluating his performance in 2023. Those actions were a mixed bag. In late 2022, the Governor announced he'd be convening a special session this year to tackle the rising gas prices across California. This was especially important given the record profits the oil and gas industry were raking in. After hearings and negotiations, the result of this special session was the establishment of a new state office that will oversee and monitor the industry's price-gouging practices. With more transparency and data, the state and environmental advocates will be in a better position to hold the industry accountable for its greed. To accomplish this, the administration and environmental community worked to ensure that the outcome would benefit the most impacted and vulnerable communities.

This collaborative effort showcased the effectiveness and importance of cooperation between the Governor's office and environmentalists. However, in mid-May, Newsom unveiled an infrastructure package that, surprisingly, revealed a lack of genuine collaboration with environmentalists. The proposal, presented as a means to leverage federal funding, posed significant environmental risks by streamlining permits for projects like the environmentally destructive Delta Tunnel and Sites Reservoir. The Governor sought to pass the package in a mere 3 weeks as part of the opaque budget process.

In response, a coalition of environmental justice and conservation groups rallied to oppose the package. We successfully lobbied for multiple legislative hearings to scrutinize the proposal, in which legislators spoke about the problems of trying to rush through a massive infrastructure package without community input. As a result, the package was significantly narrowed.

When considering these pivotal actions alongside Newsom's bill-signing decisions, a more complex picture of the Governor's involvement in the legislative process emerges. While his administration frequently emphasizes its commitment to addressing the climate crisis, it's critical that his actions align with those words. The choice of whom Newsom decides to "walk the walk" with holds significance. Often, the environmental community finds itself not entirely in step with the Administration, even in the Governor's second term.

So, what grade would we give the Governor for 2023? A "C*" would suffice.

The asterisk would signify a comment from the teacher: "Doesn't always play well with others."

Newsom's Solar Credibility Gap

By the Santa Lucia Chapter

As Sammy Roth reported in the Nov. 16 *L.A. Times*, "Just a few weeks after Gov. Gavin Newsom returned from a trip to China that he claimed was focused on tackling the climate crisis, his appointees back home voted to slash financial incentives for rooftop solar power — for the second time. Thursday's 5-0 vote by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) will make solar panels less economically enticing for apartment dwellers, farmers, schools and strip malls, solar companies say. The Commission approved similarly dramatic solar incentive cuts for single-family homes in December 2022 — a decision the industry says has prompted a [steep drop-off](#) in sales."

On Dec. 14, the CPUC – populated by Governor Newsom's appointees who serve at his discretion – decided that Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant must stay open until 2030 because

not enough renewable energy sources have come on line in the last three years to replace its output.

In so doing, they were bowing to the Governor's wishes when he overturned the state approved agreement to close the power plant by 2025 due to a fear of blackouts in its absence, reinforcing the common wisdom that, alas, California just doesn't have the power to replace it.

But on October 24, the Governor's office released [the news](#) that California has built out more than 6,600 megawatts of battery storage in just the last three years – more than three times the generating capacity of Diablo Canyon.

Keeping Diablo Canyon open will cost at least \$8.1 billion. Ratepayers of all state-regulated utilities - PG&E, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas and Electric - regardless of where they live, will foot that bill.

Prior to the CPUC's Dec. 14 meeting, the Santa Lucia Chapter and Sierra Club California sounded the alarm, urging our members to tell the CPUC, your State Senator and State Assemblymember that you don't want to pay to keep Diablo Canyon on life support with billions in taxpayer dollars when California's clean energy generation has already left Diablo in the dust.

Rather than throwing a lifeline at an aging nuclear power plant and passing the costs to California ratepayers, the state should have maintained the momentum of the unprecedented gains in its investment in renewable energy resources and increased funding for renewable energy instead. It should have, but it didn't. (See "A Nuclear Fog" in this issue.)



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Tell the CPUC that California has enough renewable energy to replace Diablo Canyon

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has been told that Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant needs to stay open because there isn't enough renewable energy to replace it. That is no longer true.

Just last month, **Governor Newsom's office** proudly shared that PG&E, Southern California Edison, and San Diego Gas and Electric have put 4,992 Megawatts of battery storage on line in the last three years. Another 1900 MW of energy storage projects are expected to be online by the end of 2023. That's three times the generating capacity of Diablo Canyon!

Keeping Diablo Canyon open will cost at least \$8.1 billion. Who will pay for this? Ratepayers of all state-regulated utilities - PG&E, Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas and Electric - regardless of where they live.

Tell the CPUC, your State Senator, and State Assemblymember that you don't want to pay to keep Diablo Canyon on life support with billions in taxpayer dollars when California's clean energy generation has already left Diablo in the dust.

For more information, check out this article on Diablo Canyon in the [New Times](#).

It looks like you've already taken this action. [Click here to find other ways to get involved.](#)

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