



Special to the Arizona Daily Star

Editor's Choice

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writers. Gordon and Lowes of Arizonans for Community Choice advocate for broader clean energy choices for electricity consumers:

Remember when mobile-phone plans came with a veritable jail cell of restrictions? Today, we would never consider a phone plan with constraints that make it so hard to connect.

Yet utilities like Tucson Electric Power (TEP) require Tucsonans to buy energy plans that deny customer choice. As such, we are forced to buy electricity generated mostly by TEP coal and gas power plants.

What if Tucson could unleash the power of cheaper and cleaner energy, faster? What if our city and county could provide energy to ratepayers while adding money into the local economy to reinvest in renewable energy projects?

Community choice energy (CCE) is the answer, with a proven track record for success. The 1,300 CCEs in the U.S. already serve more than 30 million citizens in 11 states, according to LEAN Energy US, a nonprofit that provides services to cities and counties that want to launch a CCE. They actually help ratepayers with customer choice by allowing cities and counties to buy cheaper and cleaner energy at a bulk discount, and then pass the cost savings on to ratepayers.

CCEs across the nation have been contracting with solar developers to build utility-scale solar and many other carbon-free energy projects to benefit its customers. CCEs can also help cities cover their energy use of municipal and school operations, thereby reducing expenses. This can result in using the savings for other services by cities and counties.

CCEs source the energy but maintain a partnership with utility companies, which continue to deliver power, manage the grid, handle power outages and bill customers. On average, CCEs outperform utilities with more renewable and carbon-free electricity, according to LEAN Energy US. And, in fact, communities across the country are more often choosing 100% carbon-free electricity through their CCE rate plans.

Arizona needs to officially authorize CCEs and move in this positive direction. Instead, it appears Arizona investor-owned utilities like TEP have lobbied the state Legislature to ramrod two bills through to stop this better way of choosing our electricity provider. HB 2101 and SB 1631 would stop CCE in its tracks.

CCEs help cities expedite new climate- action goals by providing the opportunity to buy far more renewable energy and generate surplus revenues to invest in local energy programs and local power development. This is made possible by purchasing from the wholesale energy market with long-term renewable energy contracts.

Tucson cannot fulfill its climate action plan with the current TEP energy portfolio. The growing public needs clean energy on a timetable that exceeds the TEP goal. By switching to a CCE, we can keep fossil fuels in the ground and allow innovation beyond TEP's one-size-fitsall program.

Please contact your legislator and tell them to allow for community choice energy for Arizona ratepayers. You can find your legislator and new voting district here: azleg.gov/MemberRoster/?body=S Tell your senators and representatives that we need to allow community choice energy to proceed in Arizona. And let TEP know its ratepayers deserve this smarter choice.

CCEs across America deliver clean energy and save ratepayers an average of 3% to 10% on their bills. Surplus revenues build over time and remain in the community, funding projects such as adding solar panels to low-income rooftops, providing EV charging stations and electrification of public transportation.

As the Tucson City Council continues with its Climate Action Plan, CCE is particularly relevant.

It's time we start thinking about our electricity the same way we think about modern-day cellphone plans. TEP lags behind global emission-reduction standards and lacks a good track record on renewable energy. CCEs are a pro-consumer strategy for Arizona and a necessary path forward to meet the Tucson climate action plan.

To find out more about CCEs and how to bring this solution to Tucson, visit our website by searching online for AZ4CC.

Shelly Gordon is the state director of Arizonans for Community Choice. Russell Lowes is a Tucson resident and current advisory board member of Arizonans for Community Choice and board member of Physicians for Social Responsibility's Tucsonbased Arizona chapter.