

NECO FUNDRAISER, September 28th, 2016 -- Rebecca Cantwell remarks:

Thank you all for coming tonight. We are delighted to see you. I want to share a little about how key energy policies are made in this state and why we are asking for your help to support our work.

The utility serving 60 percent of Colorado's population, Xcel Energy, develops plans for what it wants to do. In the instance of a recent rate case affecting everyone who pays an Xcel bill, the company spent more than \$1 million developing its proposal. All that money will later be recouped from you and me and all the other people who pay their utility bills to Xcel.

Xcel's proposals go to the agency set up by state law to regulate monopoly utilities -- The Public Utilities Commission. Its 3 members are appointed by the governor. While they have vast power, few Coloradans know anything about them or how the system works. A small group of lawyers and analysts at the PUC are charged with evaluating the utility's plans. Anyone else who wants to play in this game has to do so on their own dime. That includes the solar industry whose product represents only a little more than 1 percent of Xcel's generation portfolio but as we all know, represents the clean energy future we all need.

To "intervene" in one of the cases filed by Xcel requires a lawyer with special experience in the arcane rules of the PUC, understanding of the complicated procedures and the ability to analyze what the utility is proposing. In short, getting involved is very expensive.

This summer, we were facing three such huge cases. In addition to the rate case, we were facing a proposal from Xcel to build a giant 50MW Solar farm in competition with our industry, and the utility's plans for renewable energy programs for the next three years.

We decided to work with Xcel and others to try to come up with a settlement rather than go through months of litigation in what would be like an extended civil lawsuit on each one, with testimony, discovery, cross-examination at hearings and other complicated procedures.

During this process, Xcel had teams of lawyers, rate analysts, economists and others at the ready to critique every idea and run sophisticated analysis -- all, of course, thanks to us, the ratepayers. What did COSEIA have? A virtually volunteer lawyer, a volunteer board president, the help of other volunteer board members and an executive director with lots of other issues on her plate. We were supposed to be able to immediately offer counter proposals backed by evidence for everything Xcel proposed. We were supposed to be able to analyze and critique the impacts on our industry of sophisticated rate proposals with many moving parts.

We are pleased with what we were able to negotiate in the settlement we reached with Xcel and 22 other intervening parties. But it was only a partial victory.

Clearly, the playing field in this scenario is woefully uneven. David and Goliath comes to mind. Xcel has virtually unlimited resources because it is supported with the public's dollars. COSEIA and others who are representing a clean energy future we are trying to build, must try to respond with very few resources. To begin to lessen the disparity, changes are needed:

First, Lawmakers need to reconsider the rules of this game to ensure greater equity. For example, in other states, intervenors are granted budgets so they can afford to hire lawyers, analysts and other experts needed to effectively respond to the utility

Second, The public needs to get involved in understanding this dynamic and play a more substantial role in helping nonprofits such as New Energy Colorado communicate with policy makers and others about these issues.

Our goal is to build a world that is sustainable. With global carbon dioxide levels now exceeding 400 parts per million, we have passed a very dangerous threshold in terms of the headlong rush towards catastrophic climate change. We absolutely must reverse course quickly. Solar energy is one of the most important and immediate ways to build a clean energy future.

Solar is ready to scale rapidly to become a major energy force. We seek a fair and open solar market to benefit the citizens of Colorado while creating jobs and preserving our environment. We seek a market that fairly compensates solar energy for the time it is produced and rates that allow a fair value of solar and a competitive market without incentives.

These are the same goals that Coloradans embraced 12 years ago when we passed Amendment 37. We are still battling to fulfill these goals and we have very limited funds. We will use every penny you give us wisely as we continue to fight for a future that will preserve what makes Colorado so special.

“With utilities supported generously with the public's rate dollars, the young solar industry faces a very uneven playing field in making its case for more solar-friendly policies,” said Rebecca Cantwell, Executive Director of the Colorado Solar Energy Industries Association. “The agencies that make much utility policy are arcane and lawyer-dominated commissions and it is hard for the public to get engaged. That's why we need more people to join us as [Solar Citisuns](http://gosolarcolorado.org/) (signup at <http://gosolarcolorado.org/>) and stand up for solar.”