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Opinion Page  
The Orange County Register  
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Dear Editor:

We concur with Senator Dick Ackerman that there is an urgent need for safe and reliable energy to serve business and the general public (The Grove, January 4, 2008). Small peaker plants are an important part of the strategy to ensure power will be available in time of high demand and when routine sources of supply have been exhausted.

We believe calls for “support” of a peaker plant at a specific site in Ladera Ranch are premature, because key facts concerning the site remain unanswered. The county and the public are still reviewing information and questions concerning the land use and zoning variance needed for the site, as well as a range of environmental issues at stake. Under state law and as a matter of public policy embraced by regulatory authorities, the public is supposed to play an important part in the siting of power plants. Many in the public, including some government officials and others experienced in siting processes, find that the public outreach efforts to the residents and homeowners of Ladera Ranch have failed. Responsible public officials, proponents, as well as opponents of the power plant site, are reviewing ways to remedy this problem.

Siting of a power plant is a major decision that will have long lasting impacts on the nature and intensity of land use in the entire area. Partly because of inadequate public notice and partly due to the rush put on the permitting process, many important questions concerning the site, operation of the plant and environmental impact remain unanswered. The problem here has been exacerbated by the fact that this power plant was put through a county review process which doesn't include many of the factors usually considered in power plant siting. While the issue of air quality impacts is certainly important, there are numerous other issues concerning land use compatibility, fire safety, storage of toxic materials, zoning, noise, landscaping and traffic that remain to be answered. Serious consideration of alternative sites is needed as well, but we keep hearing from project proponents that there is not enough time for all of this.

There is an abundance of reference material on the proper procedures for siting of power plants based on years of experience by California's Energy Commission. We anticipate that the best practices of those who have the experience and expertise in power plant

siting will be brought to bear in the case of the proposed power plant at the Margarita substation. Rather than calling for support of the “Margarita Energy Center” at this time, we call for a process that provides for fully informed decisions involving input from technical experts and professionals, and the residents who will be living and raising families immediately adjacent to this plant – some as close as 300 feet. Such a process cannot be rushed. Too much is at stake for Ladera Ranch, the surrounding communities and, frankly, any similarly situated community. Advocating for a careful, educated, fair and open process is a position we hope everyone throughout Orange County, as well as all ratepayers, will support.

Sincerely,

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