

Electric bill increases are, in part, an effect of electric rate increases, which the PAO attributes, in part, to wildfire mitigation, transmission and distribution investments and rooftop solar incentives, though the PAO also notes higher bills often coincide with increased electricity use, such as greater reliance on air conditioning. In any case, the higher cost of electricity, and the jump in monthly electric bills, has led to concerns over affordability and about the ability of the state to meet its climate goals through widespread electrification (electric vehicle adoption and installation of heat pumps, for example). Some of the principal cost drivers of rate increases are legislative mandates, such as the requirement that IOUs procure greater amounts of renewable energy (though the cost to procure electricity generated by renewable resources is now oftentimes comparable to that of electricity produced by air-polluting resources).

The author notes the high cost of utility bills in California and sees review of proposals that might further increase utility costs by CCST as providing useful information to the Legislature, regulators and others. The Legislature has tried this approach before.

In 2019, the Legislature approved a measure (AB 1083 (Burke), Chapter 818, Statutes of 2019) to authorize CCST, upon request by the Legislature, to complete an analysis of the impacts of legislation related to procurement of electricity, electricity and gas products, energy storage, electrical or gas infrastructure by an electrical corporation and community choice aggregation. Established in legislation, the CCST describes itself as:

Provid[ing] objective advice from California's scientists and research institutions, we respond to the Governor, the Legislature, and other state entities who request independent assessment of public policy issues affecting the State of California relating to science and technology.

The CCST seems well qualified to conduct the assessments on ratepayers the author envisions. However, the CCST never received funding to complete this work and so, it never did so. The legislative authorization provided by AB 1083 expired on January 1, 2023.

In, 2024, the author of this bill introduced legislation—AB 1912—to create a process, like the one created by this bill, by which the Legislature may request the CCST to assess legislation that would establish a mandated program or requirement that would affect the ratepayers of electrical utilities. Unlike this bill, and unlike AB 1083 before it, AB 1912 proposed to establish an annual tax on the state's IOUs to fund the work of the CCST and prohibited the IOUs from recovering the cost of the tax from their ratepayers. Later, the bill was amended to require the PAO of the CPUC to conduct the assessment. Ultimately, AB 1912 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee's suspense file.

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