**“Glen’s Parallax Perspectives”** is a series of TV programs offering fresh ways for people to see issues such as foreign policy, social and economic justice, governmental functioning, the environment, and so forth. We provide voices and viewpoints that are rarely heard in mainstream media.

**Mainstream media, politicians, and culture see the world in conventional ways. Therefore, in order to solve problems, we need to see things in fresh ways.** Glen Anderson created this TV series to help people see things differently so we can solve problems at all levels from the local to the global.

This series title refers to “***parallax***“ – the view you get by looking from a different perspective. For example, put one finger in front of your nose and another finger farther away. Close one eye. Then open that eye and close the other. Your fingers will seem to move. This is called a “parallax” view. **This TV series invites you to look at issues from fresh perspectives.**

Each program airs three times a week (currently every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm) for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for cable TV subscribers in Thurston County, Washington. TCTV is part of Thurston County Media. You can see their schedule at [**www.tcmedia.org**](http://www.tcmedia.org)

**You can also watch the program described below through your computer** at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org). All episodes of “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” are posted on this blog’s “TV Programs” part and also in one or more of the categories listed in the right side of the computer screen. Also, see much information at the issue category headings at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

🡪 Please invite other people to watch this video and/or read this thorough summary at the “TV Programs” part of [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

🡪 The end of this document offers more information about this TV program’s topic.

**Here is the June 2019 program:**

**Why the Public Should Own Our Electric Utilities**

by Glen Anderson, the TV series’ producer and host
(360) 491-9093 **glenanderson@integra.net** [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)

**Introduction to this interview:**

The June 2019 interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” explores the many benefits of having the public own our electric utilities instead of letting big business own them.

People typically think about “democracy” in terms of government. But why not also have democracy in how we run our economy? Why can’t our economic institutions – such as our electric utility – respond to the will of the voters?

Voters can choose to have local governments own and operate our electric utilities. Dozens of cities and counties in Washington State have long, successful track records of using publicly owned utilities to provide reliable, low-cost electricity to their people. These utilities are accountable to the voters instead of sending money away to distant stockholders.

**During this hour, two knowledgeable guests explain the enormous differences between utilities that are owned by giant private corporations vs. utilities that are owned democratically by the public.**

* **Randal Samstag** is a highly experienced and respected expert in engineering related to water quality. Randal has helped people in many parts of the world with engineering for sewage treatment and other technical matters, including air pollution. He has conducted research for the “Island Power” campaign, which has worked to create a publicly owned electric utility in Bainbridge Island WA.
* **Steve Johnson** understands public power very thoroughly, especially public power’s successful history in Washington State. Steve was the Executive Director of the Washington Public Utility Districts Association. Also he is a grandfather who cares deeply about having a sustainable climate for future generations. He knows that public power can help protect the climate.

**How do publicly owned utilities differ from those owned by Big Business?**

Glen said converting to a publicly owned electric utility is not as difficult as people might think. He interviewed two guests who explained the advantages clearly.

Steve Johnson has many years of professional experience working with publicly owned electric utilities. He summarized the spirit of public power by first emphasizing the power of democratic control. He said electricity is one of the necessities for modern life, so we must figure out how to provide and control it. He said publicly owned electric utilities can do that democratically, so customers can control it locally and keep their costs low.

Randal showed the viewers a slide summarizing what public power is, and Steve summarized and commented on it. He said that Washington State has a rich history of public power and among the 50 states Washington is the second most reliant on publicly owned electric utilities. It has the most diverse kinds of these utilities, including Public Utility Districts (PUDs), city-owned utilities, rural cooperatives, and some irrigation districts that provide electricity.

**Image #1: What is public power?**



Steve explained that the federal government’s Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has been a crucial support for producing and distributing public power in the Pacific Northwest. The BPA operates 28 dams on the Columbia and Snake River system and receives power from one nuclear plant at Hanford WA.

[Although we did not discuss the Hanford nuclear power plant, people need to know that it’s basically the same design as the plants that contaminated Fukushima, Japan. See the TV interview and read the thorough summary of that TV program at this link: [**http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-fukushima-hanford-and-dangers-of-living-near-nuclear-radiation**](http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-fukushima-hanford-and-dangers-of-living-near-nuclear-radiation)]

The BPA is provides all or nearly all of the electricity for the 62 publicly owned electric utilities in Washington State. Steve explained that BPA and these utilities enjoy a partnership relationship that enormously helps the local utilities.

Glen added that he has talked with experienced people who appreciate BPA for being very helpful.

This topic is timely now for people in the Olympia area because local folks are organizing for the City of Olympia to own and operate a municipal electric utility here to replace Puget Sound Energy (PSE) within the city limits. Organizers plan to educate the public and gather enough signatures from Olympia’s voters during the middle part of 2020 in order to qualify for a city-wide initiative for the November 2020 ballot.

PSE used to be owned by many American stockholders with headquarters in Bellevue, Washington, but now it is owned by an even more huge corporation owned by rich stockholders in other countries, and it is being sold to other foreign owners.

Glen said replacing PSE with a city-owned electric utility would be good for democracy because we do not get to elect the board of directors of the giant business corporation that owns PSE and operates it without our participation, but we do get to vote for the Olympia City Council.

He said many of the organizers for a municipal utility care about the climate crisis and are eager to get away from the fossil fuels that PSE burns and quickly changed to carbon-free electricity. (We discussed this later in the interview.)

**History and variety of publicly owned electric utilities in Washington State:**

Steve had worked as the Executive Director of the Washington Public Utility Districts Association, and he knows a lot about the history and extent of publicly owned electric utilities statewide. Glen asked him to summarize the very long and successful history of publicly owned electric utilities in Washington State.

Steve said the rich history of public power goes back more than a century ago when a battleship visiting Tacoma used its dynamo to provide electricity for some of Tacoma’s street lights. Tacoma was the first city here to create a real municipal electric utility: “Tacoma Power.” [Their website says they began in 1893.] Steve said that in addition to buying BPA’s power, Tacoma Power also has created its own projects for generating electricity.

He said public power grew rapidly in the 1930s. The Great Depression was underway. Rural areas were not being served by the investor-owned utilities that provided electricity for some areas. He said that in 1929 only about 19% of farms had electricity. He said the Grange [a rural grassroots organization] wanted to do what some of the cities were doing, so in 1932 they passed an initiative that created a powerful state law allowing Public Utility Districts (PUDs) to be created. He said now there are 29 PUDs in Washington State. Collectively, these PUDs are the largest customer of the BPA, with virtually 100% carbon-free power.

Glen said that in 2012 people within Thurston County organized a campaign to put onto the November 2012 county-wide ballot a proposal to authorize Thurston County’s PUD to seriously consider providing electricity county-wide in addition to the water utility services it provides for a few small areas. He said the grassroots campaign had volunteers but almost no money, so PSE threw huge amounts of money into their propaganda campaign to defeat the ballot issue. Even so, the supporters won about 40% of the vote. He said some of the same volunteers – along with new people – are working in 2019 to put onto the November 2020 ballot for Olympia a proposal for the City to create a publicly owned electric utility for within city limits.

Steve added that this is a common pattern. He said Springfield, Oregon, tried three times to create their municipal electric utility. The succeeded on their third try. He said that educating the public is a big part of the effort. Glen agreed and said this TV interview is an early start at that.

Randal showed a visual image summarizing public power’s record of success. He said Steve created the contents of this image and emphasizes that no public power utility has ever failed or reverted to private ownership. People save money through public power partly because corporations that own utilities rake 10% off the top for profits.

**Image #2: Public power’s record of success**



Next, Randal showed slides about publicly owned electric utilities in Tacoma (a big city) and Steilacoom (a small community next to Tacoma).

**Image # 3: Tacoma**



**Image # 4: Steilacoom**

Steve said he grew up near Steilacoom. He said the electric utility is old and has 2,800 customers but only 6 employees and serves its customers with excellent reliability and very low rates. Steilacoom Electric buys all of its power from BPA and has “mutual aid agreements” with other publicly owned utilities, so they help each other in case of storm damage, etc.

He said that PSE claims that its big size creates “economies of scale,” but actually Steilacoom Electric is very small and very efficient, with very low rates. PSE’s rates are – on average – 25% higher than rates of public power utilities, and PSE’s reliability record is much worse than public utilities’ reliability. PSE’s claim of “economies of scale” is bogus. Publicly owned electric utilities – even small ones – emphasize quality service to customers and low non-profit rates. They are really close to their communities.



We briefly discussed these public utilities’ “mutual aid agreements.” They help each other out when storms occur. Steve said that recently a big storm was forecasted for Jefferson County, so their new PUD arranged for help from other publicly owned electric utilities. He said that the PUD manager told him that they had already pre-positioned two crews from Lewis County’s PUD, a long distance away, because the storm was not heading toward Lewis County. Also, publicly owned utilities loan equipment to each other when needed. Steve said that, in effect, the collaboration among them amounts to “a vast virtual large utility supporting each other.”

We briefly mentioned another kind of small publicly owned electric utility: cooperatives that are owned and operated by their members. Although not governmental entities, they are publicly owned. Several exist in parts of Pierce County, the next county north of Olympia.

**A local publicly owned electric utility would offer lower rates than PSE:**

Glen asked Randal and Steve to discuss some of the reasons why a local publicly owned electric utility would offer lower rates than PSE. Randal showed this image based on research he did. He visited the websites of 48 utilities in Washington State that publish their rates every year. Our two guests are working to create a publicly owned utility for Bainbridge Island WA, so Randal said he researched the electric rates for the average amount of electricity used by Bainbridge Island’s households. This graph shows that PSE’s regular rates and their “green” rates are among the highest in the state. PSE’s high rates disprove their propaganda that this huge company’s “economies of scale” make it efficient.

**Image #5: PSE rates are among the highest in the state.**



Glen said that if Olympia’s voters have the opportunity to have our city buy out PSE’s operations here, Olympia’s new city-owned utility would figure out how much to charge for electricity. He asked how Olympia’s municipal utility rates would compare with the rates PSE charges us now.

Steve said that in 2008 Jefferson County’s people bought out the PSE assets there and created a publicly owned electric utility, the Jefferson County PUD. The new PUD kept their rates constant with what PSE had been charging. The rates could not immediately drop because they needed to pay for the assets. This is like when a person who rents their house buys a house and needs to pay off the mortgage. In the long run it makes smart economic sense, even if you don’t save money right away.

Jefferson County’s PUD added some programs to better serve their local community, reduce rates for seniors, improve conservation and renewable energy activities, and create job opportunities for local people, including young people graduating from high school. Better service is important.

Steve repeated than when the mortgage is paid down, the rates will become better than PSE’s rates, especially as PSE’s rates continue to increase over time.

**A local publicly owned utility would keep our money in the local community:**

Glen said that PSE is owned by a giant corporation that has been based in Australia for a decade and now will be based in Canada and elsewhere. PSE sucks millions of dollars out of our local community every year and sends our money away to foreign owners. If the people in our local community owned our own electric utility we would keep our money circulating here in our local economy.

Randal said that a utility owned by the public – rather than private investors – would qualify for cheaper Tier 1 rates from BPA, which would be the cheapest possible rate. He said this wholesale rate would be cheaper than what we pay now, even apart from the profit that PSE adds on top of it, and apart from taking money out of the local economy. Puget Sound Energy used to be owned by stockholders in the U.S., but a decade ago it was sold to a giant hedge fund based in Australia, and – as often happens in such cases – the hedge fund sells it off after a while. Now it will be owned by a Canadian pension fund and a Dutch hedge fund. PSE – besides charging more for electricity – also charges our local customers a 10% return on investment. He said we could save money by investing in our own system.

Steve added that keeping money in our local community is important. Some of the money local people pay to PSE goes to its operations based in Bellevue WA and other places, in addition to going overseas. He said PSE contracts most of its line work to other companies, but a locally owned utility could hire its own local employees to do the work and keep the money circulating here. He said PSE had only two people working on the lines for all of Jefferson County, but the Jefferson County PUD has 40 employees from the local community for lines, billing, etc. They are serving the community and earning family-wage incomes that stay in the local community. The PUD has a local high school internship program.

Glen said this is “a whole different mind-set. It’s not just extracting money as profit. It’s the community building its own self as a community.”

Randal added that now people can graduate from high school or community college and immediately earn a family-wage income. This is altogether different from PSE.

**A local publicly owned electric utility would be accountable to voters:**

Glen said people in our local community are passionate about democracy. People want to elect people to serve us. When something here goes contrary to that spirit of democracy, local people demand a good, honest democracy.

Unfortunately, we do not get to elect the board of directors of the giant corporation that owns and manages PSE from some other country. But we do get to elect our own city council members, and counties with PUDs get to elect their PUD commissioners. This is a huge difference in accountability!

**Local publicly owned utilities provide better reliability and quicker recovery:**

Glen said that we have mentioned reliability as an important issue, and now we can discuss it further. Many people throughout PSE’s service area complain that PSE’s reliability is terrible. The power goes out more often than it should – and when the power does go out, PSE is very slow in bringing it back. He said his brother who lived in a nice middle-class residential neighborhood in Kirkland went without power for a whole week because PSE was so slow.

Randal showed a graph about PSE’s terrible reliability compared to public power utilities.

**[See next page.]**

**Image #6: PSE’s reliability is terrible compared to public power utilities.**



Randal explained that the graph shows how many average minutes of outage per customer of several different utilities. The first **red** column is for PSE’s customers in Kitsap County, the second red column is for PSE’s customers in Thurston County, and the third red column is the average for PSE’s customers throughout all counties that it serves.

The **blue** columns on the right half of the graph are for four publicly owned utilities in Western Washington. PSE refused to provide its information, so Randal had to file a public records request through the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC), the state agency that regulates investor-owned utilities.

He said that where he lives, PSE’s reliability is so bad that nearly everybody owns a generator so they’ll have electricity when PSE fails to provide it.

Glen said that he grew up in Snohomish County, which has a PUD (one of the blue columns to the right in Randal’s graph), and remembers that the electricity almost never went out, and if it did it was restored promptly. Glen said he has lived in PSE territory for decades now, and the power goes out very often and stays out too long.

Glen shared a recent experience of PSE’s terrible negligence in Lacey, where he lives. The City of Lacey has an excellent record of promptly fixing hazards in the public right-of-way. He said that when he has phoned to ask the City to repair hazards, the City has fixed them the very next day.

He said he lives near a busy street that bends arounds a corner with poor visibility. Traffic goes too quickly around that bend. A street light at the intersection there burned out, so he phoned Lacey’s city government to ask for a quick repair of that safety hazard. The staffer said the street light is on a pole owned by PSE, so the City was not allowed to repair it, and I’d have to call PSE. I called PSE and asked for a repair. A whole week went by with no repair, so Glen phoned the WUTC and also used the internet to file a formal complaint with the WUTC. This is what finally forced PSE to repair it a few days later. Also, the WUTC phoned and e-mailed him to make sure the repair was done correctly.

He said the state agency took good care of him, but PSE was negligent. If the City of Olympia were to create a publicly owned electric utility, the City would focus on service, as our guests have explained, and the City would hire competent experienced local employees familiar with our lines and substations and able to fix problems promptly.

Steve said he worked for PUDs for 23 years and also attended City Council meetings to deal with these kinds of issues. He said local governments really are responsive. Elected officials want to be re-elected, so they serve the public well. Also, the public can speak to local governments’ meetings, but we can’t speak at the board meetings of the giant company that owns PSE.

He said publicly owned utilities emphasize good quality service, but PSE’s main priority is to avoid spending money. Corporations focus on money, but publicly owned utilities focus on service to customers.

**A local publicly owned electric utility would provide clean energy for our
environment and climate:**

Glen said converting from fossil fuels to clean energy is a huge factor in motivating local volunteers to have the City of Olympia buy out PSE’s local operations. Both Randal and Steve are concerned about PSE’s huge carbon footprint. PSE burns a huge amount of coal, and when the state eventually forces PSE to stop burning coal, PSE wants to change to natural gas, which also is very bad for the climate.

Randal showed and explained a graph showing the huge amount of carbon pollution for each of PSE’s customers. He said each of the 65 electric utilities in Washington State is required to report its fuel mix to the Washington State Dept. of Commerce. Those fuel mix reports become available about two years after the year for which the utility is reporting. He showed a graph using 2016’s data. He converted the data to carbon pollution based on the EPA’s emission factors. PSE produces the largest amount of carbon pollution among all 65 utilities in Washington State. He divided the data by the number of each utility’s customers and found that in 2016 PSE produced 15 times more carbon pollution per customer than publicly owned electric utilities did. The image we showed on the TV screen is showed here:

**Image #7: PSE produces more carbon per customer.**



Next we showed Randal’s pie charts comparing PSE’s use of fossil fuels in comparison to public power utilities that are almost entirely fossil-free. The pie chart on the left shows that 59% of PSE’s electricity is generated by fossil fuels (37% from burning coal, and 22% from burning natural gas). Randal said “natural gas” is the euphemism for methane, which is very bad for the climate. In sharp contrast, the pie chart on the right shows that less than 2 ½% of Jefferson County PUD’s electricity comes from fossil fuels, while 87% comes from hydropower. Randal said he used EPA’s emission factors for these graphs. The process of extracting and working with methane entails problems beyond the emissions from eventually burning it.

**Image #8: PSE is 59% Public power utilities are 98% fossil fuel free.**



Glen said, “59% of PSE’s electricity comes from burning fossil fuels, and PSE wants to continue doing that as long as they possibly can. The State has a new 100% Clean Energy Act, and that means that by the year 2030, PSE will still be 20% fueled by fossil fuels, and when they are **forced** to shut down coal, they want to convert to natural gas, which is methane, and just continue right along destroying the climate. The value of getting away from PSE and getting into a locally owned electric utility (a PUD or city-owned utility) is that we could switch to fossil-free electricity.”

Randal said PSE’s marketing technique for “green power” claims they will be 50% carbon-free by 2040. But what PSE does not tell people is that their Integrated Resource Plan, which they produced in 2017 for the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, says they will be producing almost as much carbon pollution in 2035 as they are today. He said PSE will have to do something different in order to comply with the new 100% clean energy law.

Steve said Washington State is leading the other 49 states by passing the 2019 law for 100% clean energy. This new law will force investor-owned utilities such as PSE to reduce their carbon pollution. The transition will be difficult and take a long time. In sharp contrast, he said, Jefferson County’s voters moved from PSE to nearly carbon-free power within just five years after they had voted for it. He said people in the Olympia area could transition quickly by creating our own locally owned electric utility.

Steve also said he thinks PSE will find ways to push back against the new 100% clean energy law. Also, he said, PSE will have to pay a lot of money to transition away from dirty energy, and PSE will pass those costs along to their customers. This means PSE will be increasing its rates, so the gap between PSE’s expensive electricity and publicly owned low-cost utilities will widen. Public power will become an even greater bargain compared to PSE. Local communities need to commit to clean power and save money.

Glen sharply contrasted our local community from PSE’s foreign owners. He said, “The ethics, the environmental commitment, the interest and concern for the climate are all much greater here in our local community than in a giant corporation’s board room in a foreign country. If we have a publicly owned local utility here, the people – the voters – the local governments – will push further for clean, renewable energy, solar, wind,” and so forth.

He said some people elsewhere have wanted their locally owned utilities to provide high quality broadband internet throughout their entire communities. “If the public owns our electric utilities, they will be as responsive and as forward-thinking as the people of our communities are.”

Steve added that some of the locally owned utilities in Washington State are already providing broadband. He said this is easy because they already own the poles and they already have relationships with customers, so stringing broadband fiber is easy. He also said the “smart grid” improvements that we need depend on those broadband connections. These can further save energy. For example, hot water heaters can be shut off at certain times to reduce the peak load times that stress utility systems.

**Jefferson County PUD is a success story in replacing PSE:**

We have a recent success story in Jefferson County, at the northern edge of Washington State’s Olympic Peninsula. In the November 2008 election, the county’s voters decided to buy out PSE’s operations in most of that county and electrify the Jefferson County Public Utility District (PUD). They planned an efficient transition.

Glen said that if a local community decides to replace PSE or another privately owned utility with a utility owned by the local public, they would need to buy the existing assets, such as the poles, lines, vehicles, and so forth. Some people say the Jefferson County PUD paid too much for PSE’s assets, but the new PUD wanted to proceed promptly instead of dragging out the process with long negotiations or court cases. They moved quickly and now they are “paying down a mortgage,” as our guests said a few minutes before.

Steve said PSE wanted the details to be confidential between the company and the PUD’s leaders, so we don’t know what they said. But he said the WUTC, which regulates PSE, concluded that $59 million of PSE’s windfall of $120 million was too much, so the excess $59 million should be returned to PSE’s customers. For a period of time, PSE customers’ bills included a line noting “Jefferson PUD sale dividend” that was rebated to PSE’s remaining customers. So, he said, although Jefferson PUD paid too much, they were able to move quickly to be “owners instead of renters,” to enjoy local control, to enjoy carbon-free electricity, and to benefit from competitive rates starting promptly and improving the future compared to PSE’s future increases.

They accomplished all of this in only 4 ½ years from the November 2008 election to the date when they threw the switch on April 1, 2013. The transition went smoothly with absolutely no disruption of power. The few billing problems were quickly solved.

See [**www.jeffpud.org**](http://www.jeffpud.org)

**Expect PSE to fight back with a barrage of deceptive propaganda:**

Glen said we can expect that any community that wants to replace PSE with a locally owned public utility will get strong push-back from PSE.

No business wants to lose customers. In 2012, Thurston County’s people tried to electrify our PUD in in the November 2012 election, so PSE spent a huge amount of money to propagandize and frighten and deceive the voters into voting “no.”

Glen said PSE’s propaganda was very deceptive, and they outspent the organizers by a gigantic amount. (The organizers had only a little funding from voluntary donations.) Even with a minimal “yes” campaign and PSE’s huge “no” campaign, the PUD ballot issue earned 40% of the vote.

Glen said that now in 2019 local people are starting early to win Olympia’s November 2020 election for a city-owned electric utility. The public needs to understand the truth so the public can inoculate itself and withstand the malicious propaganda that will try to infect the public.

Randal showed a list of some strategies we can expect PSE to use. **[See next page.]**

**Image #9: PSE will use several strategies to block public power**



Randal said they had a parallel situation on Bainbridge Island. The two-year campaign for “Island Power” got PSE’s attention. PSE’s nearest service people were in Poulsbo, but PSE sent people to every meeting of Bainbridge’s City Council and every meeting of a Citizens Advisory Committee. They started “living” on Bainbridge Island. PSE was a “platinum” contributor to the Chamber of Commerce. They installed free generators at many churches and elsewhere. (Randal said the generators “were appropriate” because PSE’s “reliability is so poor.”) PSE threatened City Council members while examining the relevant finances.

He said Olympia’s people can expect PSE will resist a huge amount because they want to protect their huge profits. He and Glen said PSE will be using the money we paid through our electric bills to lobby against the people’s effort.

Steve added that on Bainbridge Island, PSE held a number of “town halls.” He said PSE “gave away barbecues and other stuff” to curry favor with the local people. He said the barbecues had been paid for by everybody’s electric bills. He said we “should not underestimate this company that makes a guaranteed 10% profit.” They are a monopoly, in contrast to “the competitive sector” in which other businesses operate. Many companies would be delighted to receive a guaranteed 10% profit. He said PSE will not readily give up this juicy deal.

He said we can expect PSE to scare the voters with “fear, uncertainty and doubt.” He also said PSE uses a “front” organization that sounds as if it were an environmental organization.

Glen repeated that PSE will be using the money that the people have paid through our electric bills to fight against us, and he repeated that their propaganda will be baloney, fear and lies, as it was in Thurston County’s anti-PUD campaign in 2012. He said he hopes this TV program and other community-based efforts can “inoculate” the public to resist PSE’s coming onslaught of propaganda. People should be able to say, “Oh, no. I can smell that propaganda.” The people need to be aware so they can recognize when that propaganda is thrown at us.

Steve added that PSE is very different from how our publicly owned utilities operate. “Everything Tacoma and Steilacoom does is out in the open.” The public has access to their finances, their service and reliability data, and so forth. “But not so, PSE.” He said one of the best ways for the Olympia organizers to proceed is to urge the public to look at how the 62 publicly owned utilities in Washington State are performing. They operate with open meetings, open discourse, and local control.

Glen added that elections are a huge difference. He said every local government has accounting records that are public and transparent, but “I don’t know what’s going on inside PSE. They do their own bookkeeping – and who knows what’s going on?” Although PSE has some accountability to the WUTC, the WUTC has to hire their own accounting analysts to see what’s going on. He suspected “a lot of skullduggery” within PSE.

Steve added that PSE is more secretive nowadays than when they were owned by many stockholders and traded on an American stock exchange. Back then, the U.S. government’s Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) would analyze their finances, but now that PSE is held tightly by a foreign corporation and not publicly traded on an exchange, so PSE’s finances are much more secretive and less accountable to public scrutiny.

**PSE is more risky than publicly owned utilities are:**

Even though PSE is huge, it has some risks. In contrast, publicly owned utilities are actually **less** risky than PSE is. Randal showed this image and Steve explained some items. Steve said the investor-owned utilities such as PSE like to claim that publicly owned utilities are risky, but actually **the risks are worse with investor-owned utilities such as PSE**.

**Image #10: Utility risks**



Steve said public utilities have much better credit ratings than PSE and its Australian owner does. In contrast, publicly owned utilities (PUDs and municipal utilities) have among the best credit ratings possible.

Randal said the giant California utility Pacific Gas and Electric, which is owned by investors, recently went bankrupt. In contrast, none of the publicly owned utilities in Washington has ever gone bankrupt.

Steve said public utilities have far lower climate risks.

The image above highlights some risk comparisons.

Steve added that investor-owned utility customers are at risk for the risky business ventures that those utilities get into, such as the environmentally damaging methane export plant that PSE wants to build in Tacoma, which is a very risky project opposed by many people.

Where is PSE getting the huge amount of money necessary to build that plant? What are the risks to PSE’s rate-payers in the Olympia area? We local folks will not get any benefit from PSE using our money to build a plant for exporting methane to Asia. Instead, we face environmental risks and public health risks.

**To protect the climate, we must take very strong actions now:**

Glen said the climate crisis is **extremely huge** and **extremely serious**. In order to protect Planet Earth – and ourselves – we **absolutely must** take **very strong** actions **immediately**.

Some people think that is too big a task. But the U.S. did that already at the beginning of World War II. We immediately converted our entire civilian industrial economy in order to mobilize people and produce weapons for fighting World War II.

We need that kind of immediate and total transformation now to cope with the climate crisis. We can do that again now if we can generate enough political commitment.

Randal showed this image about the huge transition the U.S. made in order to deal with World War II.

**[See next page.]**

**Image #11: We made a huge transition for World War II. Let’s do this for the climate.**



Glen said the climate crisis is an equally serious existential crisis. The climate crisis threatens to kill many millions of people and displace many more as climate refugees. The climate crisis threatens to horribly disrupt and damage human civilization and the ecosystem that we must protect in order to continue living in a decent and sustainable way.

Steve said this country can do wonderful things, and we have done wonderful things in our history. He said that when the U.S. was faced with the huge threats from Japan and Germany, our nation vastly increased the army and our weapons inventory. The U.S. increased its army from 1940 when it was smaller than that of the Netherlands, to a 12-million person army, and we equipped it. We built 300,000 planes by the end of the war. We designed and built the atomic bomb.

Glen urged the U.S. to do something on the scale that is needed – and start boldly now. Steve suggested seeing this as “a moral equivalent of war.”

Glen urged people to “think globally and act locally.” He said one way to do that would be to create a city-owned “green” electric utility with carbon-free energy instead of fossil fuels. He urged people to do this in Olympia, on Bainbridge Island, and in other communities elsewhere.

**If Olympia owned and operated our own electric utility, this would help Olympia’s people and the earth’s climate:**

Glen urged the City of Olympia – and other local governments – to replace Puget Sound Energy with locally owned electric utilities that would promptly replace PSE’s fossil fuel-generated electricity with renewable, sustainable energy.

In 2012 local people organized a campaign to electrify Thurston County’s PUD (which provides water for some small areas), but voters did not pass it. Now people are trying again for the City of Olympia to create a city-owned electric utility. The City already owns successful utilities for water and garbage, so this is a very practical project.

Local folks are starting to organize a campaign for the City of Olympia and other local communities to replace Puget Sound Energy here with a successful locally owned electric utility that will provide lower rates, better reliability, and sustainable energy – and will be accountable to the public instead of foreign stockholders.

They are starting to educate the public starting in 2019 and plan to gather enough signatures of Olympia voters during the middle part of 2020 to qualify for Olympia’s ballot for the November 2020 election.

Organizers are starting much earlier for this campaign than they did for the 2012 PUD campaign. They are seeking more volunteers. Look for publicity in the summer of 2019 and continuing until the November 2020 election.

**Sources of more information:**

Glen said this TV interview will air on Thurston Community Media, cable channel 22 in Thurston County WA three times a week throughout June 2019: every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm.

Also, he posted this TV interview to his blog. Visit [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org) and click on the “TV Programs” link or the “Energy” link or the “Olympia area” link. Click the program title, **“Why the Public Should Own Our Electric Utilities.”**

On the blog people can watch this interview and also read Glen’s very thorough summary of what we said during the interview. (You are reading that thorough summary now.)

Here are a few sources of information now. I’ll post more later to my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)

* [**https://rsamstag.com/public-power-issues/**](https://rsamstag.com/public-power-issues/)
* [**http://www.bainbridgeislandforum.org/**](http://www.bainbridgeislandforum.org/)
* [**www.jeffpud.org**](http://www.jeffpud.org)
* [**http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-a-publicly-owned-electric-utility-for-thurston-county**](http://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-a-publicly-owned-electric-utility-for-thurston-county)
* See a 1-page list of four reasons for creating a municipal electric utility for Olympia: [**http://parallaxperspectives.org/a-city-owned-electric-utility-would-help-olympias-people**](http://parallaxperspectives.org/a-city-owned-electric-utility-would-help-olympias-people)
* When Washington State law forces PSE to stop burning coal, PSE wants to burn natural gas (methane) for many more years, and continue hurting the climate. See this report on why natural gas is NOT a good solution: **https://www.climaterealityproject.org/content/climate-101-natural-gas?utm\_source=advocacy&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=HGW&utm\_content=email1&mkt\_tok=eyJpIjoiTldRek56VXdNMlE0TWpKbSIsInQiOiJaTTZxelgrYXNDdWNmMjJ0R25YRm1XYytnK2xxZTU2RWFwUkZPVFNrSEhnVzBrSGNyWmxqZnZaU1FueFVMR2RpWmpUNGdBaE44UzBia1RjaUZIbis3bmxETkROR3loYk5UaHBSRXJEc2pGM1dJM0ltcVBweU9hSE1uOGlxVVlxVHZXYmpTd28yaXlrWmFKTjkxZzdqQkE9PSJ9**

**Glen’s closing encouragement:**

Glen thanked **Randal Samstag** and **Steve Johnson** for sharing their knowledge and insights.

He also thanked the people who watched this interview.

The climate crisis is an extreme emergency, so we need to take strong actions immediately. One powerful remedy is to stop burning fossil fuels to generate electricity. Local communities can start their own publicly owned electric utilities with renewable energy.

This will help the climate, save money on our electric bills, keep our money in the local community, improve reliability, and provide democratic accountability to the voters.

Local publicly owned electric utilities are a win-win-win all around.

Our local community’s people vigorously support democracy. It makes sense to support democracy also in how we conduct our economy.

Starting in the summer of 2019, look for publicity about the new campaign for the City of Olympia to own and operate a municipal electric utility.

Volunteers will gather Olympia voters’ signatures during the middle of 2020 to put an initiative on Olympia’s ballot for the November 2020 election.

You can get information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and nonviolence through my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)or by phoning me at
(360) 491-9093 or e-mailing me at **glenanderson@integra.net**

I end each TV program with this encouragement:

**We're all one human family, and we all share one planet.**

**We can create a better world, but we all have to work at it.**

**The world needs whatever you can do to help!**