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Maine Proposal Would Force Buyout of Power Companies

A ballot initiative proposes creating a consumer-owned utility by using eminent domain to take over private electricity providers.

A measure on the November ballot seeks to overhaul how Maine residents get their electricity with a novel proposition: Create a consumer-owned utility by forcing a buyout of the state's two largest power companies.

Ballot Question 3 comes out of a grassroots campaign to ease costs and improve accountability in a system they say neglects the interests of Maine residents. Its supporters include national environmental groups and Senator Bernie Sanders. But a coalition of local businesses, labor unions, politicians and the power companies themselves say the proposal is too pricey and runs the risk of doing more harm than good.

The ballot initiative would replace the state's two largest power companies with a nonprofit utility, issuing bonds to force the purchase of Versant Power and Central Maine Power (CMP) — a move that would likely open up years of legal disputes over the use of eminent domain.

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