



[Power for the People podcast, with Elin Katz, Connecticut Consumer Counsel and President of NASUCA](#)



More Power To You creator and host [Josh Cohen](#) with Elin Swanson Katz, [Connecticut's Consumer Counsel](#) and the current president of [NASUCA, the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates](#), Washington DC, march 9, 2018

In this episode ([Ep.35](#)) of [More Power To You](#), a podcast dedicated to a sustainable, clean energy economy, looks at the energy transition from the perspective of one of its key players—the Consumer Advocate via a 30-minute audio interview with Elin Swanson Katz, [Connecticut's Consumer Counsel](#) and the current president of [NASUCA, the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates](#) NASUCA.

Creator and host [Josh Cohen](#) is a clean energy consultant and advocate, and is a former Mayor of Annapolis, Maryland and served as Deputy

Administrator of USDA's [Rural Utilities Service](#) during the Obama Administration.

This episode explored what the electric utility consumer's interest is, including issues such as energy storage and electric vehicles, and closed with a discussion of the evolving convergence of utilities such as electricity and telecom, and how the focus of the utility services may continue to evolve in the future.

Elin Katz spoke with [Josh Cohen](#) about how the utility industry, including electric and telecom, is rapidly changing and how necessary it is for consumers to have a central role in the structuring and conversations surrounding this evolution. This extends to power grid, transmission and distribution, and Katz noted how essential for all such discussions to include pole attachments, the rights and obligation of pole owners and the public rights of way itself, as topics that affect a wide and diverse set of players. Other essential topics that are shaping the future of public utility services and consumers include third party customer choice questions and the environmental concerns that underpin much that public utilities do.

As a consumer advocate for Connecticut and for the nation in her role as president of NASUCA, Katz noted that it has become more nuanced to determine just who the consumer is in each issue, and how it is crucial to balance the rights of those various consumer groups. While facilitating conservation measures is a topic of interest to all, along with customer choice, just for instance, the financial and political support of all these diverse issues requires input from the widest possible spectrum of players in order to achieve maximum fairness to all.

Utility consumer advocates like Katz, she noted, must always be sensitive to the rights of low income consumers since they usually lack a voice in political and financial forums, yet in Connecticut alone low income or payment plan consumers represent fully a quarter of all electric customers. They are obviously struggling to be heard in the face of this mammoth marketplace, where costs, profits, and shareholder rights often are well represented.

Katz noted that she has recently been testifying at the Connecticut General Assembly during this year's legislative session, advocating for a wide array of consumers (residential, business, community anchor institutions) on dozens of proposed bills, at least some of which will presumably become

law. Immediate concerns are of course important to the daily lives of many consumers, Katz said, but the future of the industry and indeed the planet is also of concern for consumers and advocates.

Climate change, RPSs, clean and renewable energy sources, electric and driverless cars, and conservation issues must also play a part in the advocacy structure on the state and federal levels for a sustainable market and world future. While companies may see financial rewards or production efficiencies in promoting the "latest widget", consumers might not be best served by market exploration by the companies, particularly if it involves ratepayer expense.

It is essential in a market that is changing and fragmenting so rapidly to not only look at the various demographics and business segments, but to actually engage all constituent players to break down silos and isolation from the problems preventing growth. For instance, the convergence of the telecom industry, by merging segments such as the cable and telephone businesses, and the actual technology issues such as fiber networks and IP-digital technologies which have disintermediated the copper and coaxial businesses, not to mention telecom issues impacting the electric business itself.

For instance, Smart Grid issues are directly tied to broadband access, Smart Cities, Smart Cars and a host of players and issues yet to be identified. Katz pointed out that, in her state role and as the president of a national association, she and her constituents are focused on utility consumer advocacy, but that without a broad and inclusive foundation (e.g., FERC and FCC cooperating to develop public policy goals in conjunction with both the energy and telecom industries), the necessary cross conversations will not occur, and silos will result.

Consumer advocacy has evolved, most rapidly in the last few years, with a greater acceleration clearly on the horizon, from rate cases and basic infrastructure construction cases, into far broader public policy questions encompassing a wide and diverse set of critical players. Katz noted that the demands on her time as a speaker, author of legislation, and other policy instruments has grown exponentially over the seven years she has held her appointed position in the state. She sees far less centralized decision making by entities such as Congress or state regulatory bodies as the market evolves into groups of similarly-motivated and faster-moving entities

that gather constituencies rapidly in order to most efficiently create needed changes.

Katz predicted that future problems and issues will encompass even more breadth of engagement by individual groups and regional associations on topics such as community solar, net neutrality issues of importance to energy companies, RPSs goals, and electric efficiency groups needing restructuring to remain at the forefront of the problems presented by new technologies and business structures.

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