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Residents fight Ameren rate hike

Official says increase will save money later

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

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BY MICHAEL SMOTHERS
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA - Another energy cost increase for central Illinois residents this year will help prevent more hikes in the future, a top official with the utility argued at a public hearing Tuesday night.

Peoria-area AmerenCILCO customers, for that matter, would see not only the lowest "delivery rate" increase among those proposed for downstate Illinois, their natural gas costs will decline, the official said.

It didn't matter, however, what arguments Craig Nelson, vice president for Ameren Illinois Utilities, made from the Woodruff High School auditorium stage.

One after another, speakers representing advocacy groups or just themselves rose in opposition to the proposed increases before an Illinois Commerce Commission hearing officer.

Under Ameren's proposals, average AmerenCILCO customers would see their electricity bills rise about \$35 a year but their natural gas bills drop about \$16 annually. AmerenCIPS and AmerenIP customers would see higher increases in both.

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Perhaps privately-owned Ameren has the right to make a fair profit as the only provider available in the now-deregulated energy business, but it shouldn't get greedy, said Ila Minson of rural Hopedale.

"Obviously, they're like the little boy in a candy store," she told the hearing officer. "We're not asking you to deprive them of the candy, but limit what they get."

The hearing was the fourth of sixth the ICC scheduled to hear citizens' and advocacy groups' comments on Ameren's request, which it submitted to the ICC in November. The ICC has a Sept. 30 deadline to decide.

The request comes under state regulatory authority because it involves Ameren's distribution of energy to its customers, "and you don't have a choice" to receive electricity or natural gas from another supplier, said state Sen. Dave Koehler, D-Peoria, who attended the hearing "to hear (speakers') stories."

They came from about two dozen people who signed in to make comments, and were led off by Mary Patton, a former Peoria Circuit Court clerk and now local representative for the AARP.

The rate increase will strike hardest at older people on low fixed incomes, she said, and "will negate (the) victory" in which the state forced Ameren to rebate large amounts of the higher energy payments it charged last year after the end of state utility rate regulation saw its rates skyrocket.

Randy Fritz, representing the watchdog Citizens Utility Board, said Ameren seeks an increase only months "after it got its wrists slapped" with the rebates. "And now the power company is reaching for our pocketbooks again."

"No one likes price increases; I know I don't like price increases," Nelson said, but one now will help Ameren improve its bond rating, making borrowing for future needs cheaper and future rate increases less likely.

Michael Smothers can be reached at 686-3287 or msmothers@pjstar.com.



Have a thought on this issue? Share it by leaving a message at (309) 687-8439 or e-mailing youpage@pjstar.com. Comments may appear in the Journal Star's **YOUPage** on Friday.

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Dale February 21, 2008 - 17:03

Subject:

File your complaint today:
www.icc.illinois.gov
odr.bbb.org
www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov

Here is mine:

Ameren has tripled my bill and wants to do another rate increase. They are a monopoly and need stopped. They made 77 percent profit in the 4th quarter of 2007 and pay their CEOs an average 100,000-dollar bonus so their rate increase is unjustified no matter how they put it. There should have been a rate freeze last year.

Thomas Jefferson February 21, 2008 - 04:32

Subject:

Ameren has a profit addiction! Its called MONOPOLY.

OH YEA SUCKERS

STEVE February 20, 2008 - 21:45

Subject: AMEREN

SO did you go out and vote for the same politicians that said they were going to help us out the last time they raised the rates.WE wound up with a check that AMEREN IS STEALING BACK.I guess it`s like HOPE&CHANGE

greg - pekin February 20, 2008 - 18:14

Subject: Utility raise/profit

The NEED for a INCREASE after their recent anouncement of their PROFIT is summed up in one mere word.

R A P E !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[Anne](#)

February 20, 2008 - 17:13

Subject:

All I know is everything goes up except my paycheck.

[Stormin' Norman](#)

February 20, 2008 - 17:12

Subject:

People affected by sexual addictions produce children they can't support, and much like the gambler or alcoholic, are befuddled why they have no money left to pay for food and utilities. Sadly, government forces fiscally responsible consumers to become saddled with the burden of those who lack any sense of budgeting and family planning...

[JR](#)

February 20, 2008 - 16:28

Subject: Re:Sue

Care to elaborate on the 'excessive middle management men and women'? Do you have specifics, or are you just speaking in generalities? I see fewer people working for CILCO now than I ever did. The facility on the north end and downtown are shells compared to what they once were.

[drew stimley](#)

February 20, 2008 - 16:07

Subject:

Coal burning stoves give off great heat

[gus greenway](#)

February 20, 2008 - 15:40

Subject:

if drew stimley wouldn't beat me at monopoly everytime we play, I might be able to afford my cilco bill. drew in '08!!!

[imagine that](#)

February 20, 2008 - 13:22

Subject:

hey look everyone is using unnecessary electricity to post thier un needed opinion that is not goin to change any minds when you only use it from behind a big bright electric computer screen! if you have an opinion worth hearing get out and voice it at a meeting where they can see you!

[Just another Resident](#)

February 20, 2008 - 12:42

Subject:

Why did they send us those rebate checks a few months ago if all they were going to do is turn around and ask for rate hike?

[Chad](#)

February 20, 2008 - 12:02

Subject: Priorities

Everyone in this forum could pay for the entire year's increase if they gave up their internet service for just one month.

[Yeah right](#)

February 20, 2008 - 11:35

Subject: RE: Bleep

Maybe people will "grow up and stop whining" when some of the injustices that have been perpetrated upon the public are rectified. For one, Ameren is hiking rates and giving us less. The first thing this turd of a company did upon takeover was close the office downtown so that customers have no access to the company to pay their bills directly in cash and have to go to "pay agents". Second, they claim that they posted one heck of a profit after the last hike, so why do they need another? Does the CEO need another friggin private jet, so they have to hike rates to even out the cost? Let's face it, we pay for the spoils of corporate greed in these large companies, not just the service that we need. I don't care how much money Ameren wanted to throw at them, CILCO should never have sold out!

[Bleep](#)

February 20, 2008 - 11:23

Subject: What

You know, utility rates are not the only thing that constantly goes up.

Why do we just pick on that? Have you looked at the price of gasoline, food -- any goods and services. It's all sky high and climbing.

The world is a very expensive place to live in. We all have to conserve -- do our best -- and get on with it. It's really hard -- but we cannot all slip into the Twilight Zone and keep wishing things will stay the same forever.

Grow up and stop whining.

Rick

February 20, 2008 - 10:30

Subject:

I always thought when Illinois Power was running things my utility rates were ok, but then Ameren took over and now it's just a rate hike after another

Martin

February 20, 2008 - 10:26

Subject: A suggestion for the PJS

Since this energy problem is not going to go away anytime soon, how about adding a FEATURED COLUMNIST who would do a weekly energy conservation story. While there are a lot of these stories in magazines and on the internet, they often only present ideal data or overly optimistic claims because they want to sell you something. I would like to see REAL stories about REAL local people who are doing something about cutting their electric and gas bills including actual costs vs. actual payback. I would also like to read about the projects which didn't work out as planned.

Its become very apparent that we are just going to have to help ourselves and each other.

Silent Bob - Peoria Heights

February 20, 2008 - 10:07

Subject:

It should be illegal for politicians to accept contributions from any type of company that produces a product that is considered necessity or really has no competition. Utilities (phone, cable, internet), patrolium, natural gas & eletric, etc..

TAXPAYER

February 20, 2008 - 08:50

Subject:

IT'S ELECTION YEAR . YOU KNOW THESE MOPES WILL BE HOLDING COFFEES FOR SENIORS, PROMISING TO DO WHATEVER HE CAN TO HELP YOU,HUG YOU AND TELL YOU HE "FEELS YOUR PAIN",PROMISE THIS AND PROMISE THAT,ALL THE WHILE BLOWIN' SMOKE UP YOUR ARS !!!!! P.S. TO ERNIE: EVERYONE PAYS THE SAME RATE, NOT JUST SENIORS.

Reality Check

February 20, 2008 - 08:41

Subject: Legalized price gouging

Remember the last round of Ameren price hikes and how people complained and vented by commenting on articles like this? Ameren is just one spoke in the big wheel that is carrying us all to financial ruin.

Could it be the lack of postings here depicts the futility of fighting Ameren? We have all come to realize that they could not get away with doing this if not for the blessing of our elected officials. They all signed on to that lame-brained piece of legislation deregulating the utility company so that competition could bring the price down. The competition did not materialize. AMEREN IS A MONOPOLY and they are going to keep picking us clean as long as they are allowed to do so.

I am hopeful that good old American ingenuity will eventually take hold and lead individuals and small businesses to find their way out of the grip of Ameren and OPEC, - i.e. - solar power, wind power, geothermal systems - automobiles powered by self-generated electricity. It scares the living hell out of me when I read about our escalating trade imbalance and national debt, which is largely caused by our inability to manufacture for our own needs and our dependance on foreign oil. Our debt is being financed by borrowing money from the likes of China.

Most people cannot afford to go solar much less worry about the national debt. They are too busy just trying to pay their utility bills, buy food and health care, however, they can vote. The first step is getting rid of these self-serving mental midgets, local, state and federal - that allowed this to happen. The voters need "recall rights" at mid-term on officials that have let them down - and we need to make lobbying absolutely illegal. The wealthy should be limited to having ONE vote like the rest of us. Lets level the playing field. I realize all this sounds overwhelming but I hope voters will take that first step by voting these bums out of office when they come up for re-election.

TAXPAYER

February 20, 2008 - 08:38

Subject:

JUST REMEMBER THAT THE DEMOCRATS [IN CONTROL OF BOTH HOUSES AND GOVERNORS OFFICE] DID NOTHING TO REMEDY THIS BEFORE THE RATE FREEZE ENDED. THIS INCLUDES GEORGE SHADID [WHO HAND PICKED DAVE KOEHLER TO REPLACE HIM] AND MIKE SMITH FROM CANTON. DEMOCRAT SENATE PRESIDENT EMIL JONES HAS TAKEN SO MUCH MONEY FROM COMMONWEALTH EDISON THAT HE COULDN'T TURN ON HIS MEAL TICKET SO HE SCREWED THE PUBLIC .HE AND THE REST OF THE DEMOCRATS THAT KISS HIS ARS!!!

[ernie](#)

February 20, 2008 - 08:37

Subject: Utilites

ANOTHER REMINDER I KNOW THAT I WILL WATCH ANY ELECTED OFFICIALS AND I WILL NOT VOTE FOR ANYONE WHO ARE NOT HELPING US SENIORS.. GREEDY... GREEDY... GREEDY..ALL THEY CAN DO IS TAKE THERE MONEY TO HELL WITH THEM... ERNIE ON FIXED INCOME.

[Fed up](#)

February 20, 2008 - 08:32

Subject:

I have an ideal why don't everyone of Ameren costumers just stop paying their bills, then they will know we are not going to put with their greed any longer.

[Sue - Avon, IL](#)

February 20, 2008 - 08:31

Subject: Time to clean house

Maybe if Ameren would get rid of excessive middle management men & women in the office, they wouldn't need to go after the hard working class and seniors for their over pricing. I hate to see people loose their jobs, but there is a lot of waste going on.

[ernie](#)

February 20, 2008 - 08:28

Subject: Utilites

I'M ON FIXED INCOME.. WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS TO US, SOUNDS LIKE THEY ARE WANTING BACK AND MORE TO COVER THOSE REBATES THEY GAVE US. WITH HIGH FOOD PRICES,GAS,PHONE,HIGH

MEDICATIONS, PLUS BILLS, I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO TURN... WE NEED SOMEONE TO FIGHT FOR OUR NEEDS NOT JUST TALK. FIXED INCOME AND PUSHED INTO A CORNER.. GOD HELP US FROM THESE GREEDY PEOPLE, THEY ALSO WANT PART OF OUR REBATE THE GOV. IS SENDING..ERNIE.. EAST PEORIA,IL

Senior Citizen

February 20, 2008 - 07:58

Subject:

Thanks to all of you that attended to represent the public.

After all our calls,letters, and e-mails failed to have any effect last year on our elected officials, I suspect this public hearing is just another puppet show.

It has become obvious the last couple years that our elected officials at first did nothing to protect us from these excessive rate increases and then made a big show out of doing little. I will do the only thing I can. I will lower my thermostat even further and vote AGAINST every incumbent at the next election.

Geezer

February 20, 2008 - 07:55

Subject: Who?

They are who we thought they were!

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