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ComEd plan faces critics in Joliet

ELECTRICITY RATE INCREASE PROPOSED

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JOLIET -- ComEd leaders visited Joliet on Thursday, making their case for a proposed electricity rate increase to maintain the utility's system, keep up with growing demand, and modernize the business's workings.

Meanwhile, organizations such as the Citizens Utility Board and seniors group AARP are opposing the proposed \$361 million increase.

ComEd is requesting an increase that, if granted in full, would increase the average residential customer's monthly bill by about 8 percent, roughly an additional \$6 on an average \$75 monthly bill, according to a company statement.

Anne Pramaggiore, an executive vice president with ComEd, spoke of three major reasons behind the company's proposal.

"Our costs have increased," Pramaggiore told the audience at the Illinois Commerce Commission hearing in the Little Theater at Joliet Central High School. In the past two years, ComEd has seen the cost of transformers double in price and the cost of wire increase 50 percent, Pramaggiore said.

The second main reason is rapid growth in ComEd's service territory.

"Will County actually happens to be the second-fastest growing county in our service territory," Pramaggiore said. "And what we're doing is putting up a lot of wires and poles where there previously were cornfields, or we're enhancing infrastructure that's already in place."

Finally, Pramaggiore mentioned benefits of modernizing the system, such as automatic metering.

"Today, if you have an outage, you need to call ComEd ... You could be out at the grocery store and have an outage, and we wouldn't know until you got home and called us," she said. "Automatic metering will allow us to instantaneously know when any customer is out in the system."

Rate hike critics

Bob Flynn, of Morris, a representative for AARP, spoke against the proposed rate increase.

"The simple truth is that working people, families, retirees and small-business owners cannot afford to pay these ever-skyrocketing energy bills," Flynn said. "For older adults, their share of utility services can be as high as 24 percent of their monthly income."

"This means many will be forced to choose between paying their utility bills, rent, buying food or prescription drugs," Flynn said.

"Once again we believe that ComEd is asking for a huge rate hike which it simply doesn't deserve," said Jim Chilsen, spokesman for the Citizens Utility Board, in an interview before the hearing.

At the hearing, Robert Ostrowski, of Joliet, spoke about concerns of fellow retirees.

"I would just like to see some company come out and say, 'We're going to not increase fees. We're making millions of dollars a year.'"