



State agency charged with watching electric rates to hire consultants

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SPRINGFIELD -- The state agency charged with trying to keep Illinois electric rates from spiking is preparing to hire consultants to lead its efforts.

This spring, Ameren and ComEd will buy some of the power they then will deliver to customers. How much the utilities pay in the coming months eventually will affect how much customers pay on their bills.

In 2007, electric bills surged for some Central and southern Illinois customers, and the ensuing outrage led to the Illinois Power Agency being formed to try to keep costs reasonable.

Now, the agency's director, Mark Pruitt, has started the process of hiring consultants in an effort to make sure the utilities get the best possible price.

Citizens Utility Board director David Kolata said electricity prices on the market are down now, but they could go back up.

"It's really been a roller coaster," Kolata said.

Even though creating the Illinois Power Agency was a key part of the 2007 electric rates deal that sent rebate checks to customers, Pruitt is the only one working there so far.

He called it the best job he's ever had, but he said he hiring staff has taken time.

"I've put multiple plans forward," Pruitt said.

Kolata said the agency would probably be better off with some more staff, but complimented Pruitt's work.

"He's doing a heck of a job considering it's a one-man agency," he said.

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