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Ameren's back too soon

Scott Cisel, the president of Ameren's Illinois utilities, would have people believe it operates like other businesses.

Not so. At a time when most businesses are slashing prices to keep customers, Ameren wants to raise its rates for delivery of electricity and gas by \$226 million. It would be a 7 percent to 8 percent increase for most AmerenIP residential customers.

That's a lot, especially considering it hasn't even been nine months since the Illinois Commerce Commission gave Ameren's three utilities a \$162 million increase.

While most businesses are freezing or even cutting wages, Ameren gave its workers on average 3 percent pay raises.

And while many businesses are struggling to keep revenues above expenses, Ameren wants a guaranteed double-digit profit margin. The rate increase includes a request for an 11 to 12 percent to 12.25 percent return on equity for electric and gas.

The fact is, Ameren has never been like any other business. Despite deregulation, the utility companies in Illinois continue to have a monopoly on residential service. If you live in AmerenIP's service area and want electricity or natural gas in your home, you have just one place to purchase it. You can't switch service providers for electricity or natural gas the way you can with phone service.

Cisel says that Ameren needs the higher rates to maintain and upgrade its system. We'll let the ICC, Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the consumer watchdog groups comb through 1.2 million pages of filings and figure that out. But how disappointing that the company is back so soon, and asking for so much from its captive customers.

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