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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Public Hearing

May 24, 2007

Wohl Community Center Auditorium

St. Louis, Missouri

Volume 4

In the Matter of)
Laclede Gas Company's } Case No. GR-2007-0208, et al
Tariff to Revise)
Natural Gas Rate)
Schedules)

NANCY DIPPELL, Presiding
DEPUTY CHIEF REGULATORY LAW JUDGE
CONNIE MURRAY,
LINWARD "LIN" APPLING,
COMMISSIONERS

REPORTED BY: Sheila Field, CCR No. 1226

1 APPEARANCES:

2

3 Laclede Gas Company Counsel:

4 Mr. Mike Pendergast

5 Ms. Gloria Thirdhill

6 Mr. George Csolack

7

8 Office of Public Counsel:

9 Mr. Marc Poston

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11 Public Service Commission Staff:

12 Mr. Robert Franson

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20 The Court Reporter:

21 Sheila Field
22 Midwest Litigation Services
23 711 North Eleventh Street
24 St. Louis, Missouri 63101
25 (314) 644-2191

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1 * * * * *

2 PROCEEDINGS

3 JUDGE DIPPELL: I'd like to welcome you all
4 here this evening. It's Thursday, May 24th, 2007. The
5 Missouri Public Service Commission has set this time for
6 a public comment hearing in Case No. GR-2007-0208.
7 Laclede Gas Company seeks to implement a general rate
8 increase for its natural gas service in Missouri.

9 I am Nancy Dippell and I'm the Regulatory
10 Law Judge who is going to preside over the actual
11 hearing this evening. With me tonight is Commissioner
12 Connie Murray to my right and Commissioner Lin Appling
13 to my left.

14 Most of you probably already know -- you
15 were probably here for the information session, so I
16 won't go into too much about the commission, but we
17 mainly regulate investor owned utilities and regulate
18 the rates for services and also the safety aspects. The
19 commission is made up of a total of five commissioners.
20 The other three commissioners will read the record that
21 the court reporter is taking down.

22 This is an official hearing of the Public
23 Service Commission and so statements and testimony of
24 witnesses will be recorded by the court reporter and
25 must be given under oath or affirmation.

1 All the commissioners will have an
2 opportunity to read those remarks. And I think it's
3 proper to introduce the commission staff here this
4 evening and that of staff counsel, Robert Franson in the
5 front row there, Ann Underwood who was speaking to you
6 earlier, Gay Fred, Kim Boland, and Beverly Faulkner are
7 all here and they can help answer questions if you have
8 further questions.

9 In addition, we have representatives from
10 the Public Counsel in the front row, Marc Poston. The
11 Public Counsel represents the general public and private
12 commission. And we also have some company
13 representatives, Mr. Pendergast is over here to the
14 right and he probably has some company people here to
15 answer questions also.

16 MR. PENDERGAST: Yes. We have here
17 Gloria Thirdhill right over there. She can help with
18 any service coordinative problem you might have. We've
19 got Doug Yaeger, our president and CEO and
20 George Csolack here as well.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Mr. Pendergast.
22 We may need you to repeat those for our court reporter
23 later, in case she missed some of the names.

24 I'd like to thank the Wohl Community Center
25 for letting us use their facilities this evening. The

1 purpose of tonight's hearing is to hear your comments
2 regarding the rate increase. The company's not going to
3 present witnesses tonight and will not answer questions
4 while we're on the record. The commissioners and I are
5 not going to answer questions either, but like I say,
6 our staff can answer questions if you have them.

7 The purpose of us being here tonight is to
8 hear your comments and take those into the record. We
9 also have several other public hearings scheduled in the
10 St. Louis area. You can testify here tonight. It's not
11 necessary that you come and testify at the other
12 hearings. If you want to come and participate, that's
13 fine. If you testify here tonight and there's a large
14 crowd at the other hearings, you might be asked to wait
15 until after people who haven't already testified get a
16 chance to testify.

17 When your name is called -- if you haven't
18 already signed up on the sign-up sheet, you can do so at
19 any time and I'll call -- after I've called all the
20 names, I'll ask if there's anybody else. When your name
21 is called, I'll ask you to come up, if you are able, and
22 sit at the microphone here. I'll ask you to spell your
23 name for the court reporter and then I'll ask you to
24 give your comments. There may be some questions from
25 some of the attorneys or the Public Commission or

1 myself. So I'll ask that you stay at the mike until
2 you're excused.

3 We'll end after everybody's had an
4 opportunity to speak and I think that pretty much
5 concludes the general procedures. I'll let counsel make
6 their entries for appearance. Let me begin with staff.

7 MR. FRANSON: Robert Franson, F-R-A-N-S-O-N,
8 appearing on behalf of the staff of the Public Service
9 Commission, PO Box 360, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102.

10 JUDGE DIPPELL: Mr. Pendergast.

11 MR. PENDERGAST: Thank you. Mike Pendergast
12 appearing on behalf of Laclede Gas Company and our
13 business address is 720 Olive Street, St. Louis,
14 Missouri 63101. Thank you.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Mr. Poston.

16 MR. POSTON: Marc Poston, appearing on
17 behalf of the Office of Public Counsel, PO Box 230,
18 Jefferson City, Missouri 65102.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: And are there any records
20 that any counsel or anybody wants to make an appearance
21 for any of the parties?

22 I see none.

23 Commissioners, would you like to make any
24 opening remarks?

25 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Just thank you for

1 your presence.

2 JUDGE DIPPELL: All right. Let's just go
3 ahead then. The first person I have here is
4 Cleo Sanders.

5 MR. SANDERS: I'll be glad -- I just got up
6 there and spoke before. I'll be glad to speak now. You
7 can just hear and listen, you can't answer any
8 questions. So I spoke and I said everything that I had
9 to say over there and I'll go back there and I'll talk
10 to him.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Thank you sir. Thank
12 you for coming. Shirley Johnson?

13 SHIRLEY JOHNSON,
14 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
15 as follows:

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Please spell
17 your name for the court reporter.

18 MS. JOHNSON: My first name is spelled
19 S-H-I-R-L-E-Y. My last name is Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N.

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: Go ahead with your comments.

21 MS. JOHNSON: My concerns are about the cost
22 incurred for usage. I cannot afford to continue use of
23 service at such a high cost of rate of usage. I need
24 the service, but at what cost? I find it difficult to
25 function when the cost of living is out the roof, when

1 I'm living on retirement pay. I requested -- asked for
2 customer billing that is reasonable to the customer
3 base.

4 I don't understand that the new computer
5 readers are not accurate, but are used for billing
6 purposes.

7 I don't get the fact that the consumer is
8 not given any consideration for relief of payment. I
9 call and get relief, but I still need a part-time job
10 just to pay my monthly bills.

11 I don't know if you, the company, will ever
12 listen to what we are asking. I only hope that we can
13 get some relief from the costly rate of charges for
14 services rendered. I am a customer who needs help in
15 paying my bill.

16 I don't think that we get any relief during
17 the cooling degree months anymore. I feel that the
18 heating degree months continues throughout the entire
19 year. I don't understand that.

20 I am at my wit's end trying to ensure that
21 my service will not be shut off. I am grateful for this
22 opportunity to voice my opinion in this matter.

23 I want to add too, my last three month's
24 bills, I paid on the first -- since I've retired, I have
25 to pay on the first of the month -- the amount that I

1 was charged for -- the current charges for the months
2 of, I think this is May, was \$302.24. Previous to that,
3 there was April. My current charges was \$467.34. Okay.
4 In March, my current charges were \$674.73. We're
5 talking month to month to month.

6 It's ridiculous and not fair for retirees to
7 have to pay and I was paying the help -- the dollar
8 help. I had to stop that, because I needed the help.
9 It got to the point where my billing was so outrageous.
10 It's just impossible. And I need the service. And I'm
11 concerned about the welfare of many people who cannot
12 afford it. We don't make a lot in this society, this
13 program. But I won't get into that issue, because
14 that's another issue. But I have concerns about these
15 charges that are astronomical.

16 And budget billing didn't make a difference.
17 It didn't matter. Budget billing was outrageous too.
18 So I just called down there and got an adjustment and
19 they adjusted it down, my billing down for a temporary
20 -- but it's still over \$200. I'm living on a retired
21 budget and I have other obligations to pay. And we're
22 not talking about Ameren, but there are other
23 obligations I have.

24 It's just outrageous. It's unfair. And it
25 seems like nobody cares. And I don't want to lose my

1 service. I don't even cook. I let Schnucks do my
2 cooking. And I just have a hot water heater. I have a
3 furnace. I have what they call hot water radiated heat,
4 not hot air, but radiated heat, hot water, radiated
5 heat, which was supposed to have been cheaper than hot
6 air, but it just so happens, the house that my husband
7 and I are trying to buy, that's what -- that's the way
8 the house was already. So it was fine with me because I
9 could keep toasty and warm in the cold weather. But the
10 billing has gotten outrageous.

11 I'm really concerned about to what extent
12 the company is willing to go to, to get their money, but
13 we're not getting -- I'm not getting any extra money.
14 When I had a part-time job as a retiree, it was fine, I
15 could do that. But now, I'm living on a fixed income.
16 My husband is self-employed and his money doesn't come
17 often or however. So I dig in him and his pocket to
18 help me pay the month to month. And I don't like to
19 depend on somebody else for me to survive. Because I
20 don't know when he might pack his bag and leave. You
21 know what I'm saying? I don't take anything for
22 granted.

23 Life is precious and I'm sharing this with
24 anybody and everybody who is -- I'm a breast cancer
25 survivor and I still have bills after two years. And

1 I'm trying to survive, but it makes it awfully hard and
2 it's frustrating to have to pay these exorbitant rates.
3 And this is only one of the many bills I have to pay.
4 Everybody has to stand in line and it's just not fair.

5 I'm through. I'm done. Thank you very
6 much.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Wait just a
8 moment, Ms. Johnson. Commissioner Murray, did you have
9 questions?

10 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: I don't, but thank
11 you.

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

13 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I don't have any
14 questions, but we do have someone that can help --
15 Ms. Johnson, we have someone who can help you with the
16 bill. Thank you.

17 JUDGE DIPPELL: Ms. Johnson, wait just one
18 moment if you don't mind. I just wanted to ask a little
19 bit. Because I don't understand the radiant heat. So
20 -- but you do use --

21 MS. JOHNSON: Radiator.

22 JUDGE DIPPELL: Right. Do you use the gas
23 to heat the water?

24 MS. JOHNSON: Yeah. That's the way it does.

25 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. And then how big is

1 your house?

2 MS. JOHNSON: I have like -- I'm in a two
3 family flat. My husband and I live on the second floor
4 and we have like four rooms that are actually heated,
5 that have radiators in them. And we got heat and I was
6 able to sustain -- I called Laclede and they're working
7 with me, work with them for the billing. But it's still
8 too much to pay.

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: And you're no longer on
10 budget billing? You said you tried that.

11 MS. JOHNSON: I -- no. I haven't been on
12 budget billing for some time now. Budget billing didn't
13 work for me.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Thank you. Are there
15 any questions from any of the attorneys?

16 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

17 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

18 We have Pollie Green as the next person.

19 Pollie Green is not here? Annette Jenkins?

20 ANNETTE JENKINS,
21 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
22 as follows:

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
24 spell your name for the court reporter.

25 MS. JENKINS: First name and last name?

1 First name is A-N-N-E-T-T-E. Last name is
2 J-E-N-K-I-N-S.

3 JUDGE DIPPELL: I might need you to speak up
4 just a little bit, because I'm having trouble with all
5 these lights.

6 MS. JENKINS: The reason that I came is
7 because I'm trying to understand how Laclede Gas can ask
8 for another raise and they're not doing anything to help
9 the people.

10 Myself, my gas has been cut off since last
11 year. I'm trying to make arrangements to pay and I'm on
12 budget billing. I've explained to them that I'm on the
13 budget billing for 150 and I am on a fixed income
14 myself. There were some comments made about how they
15 put you on the budget billing, how they figure out the
16 rate and \$150 is too much for me. I talked with Laclede
17 over and over and I asked them, you know, how can I keep
18 my gas on and they are just not willing to work with me.

19 For me, 6.50 more would hurt me more than
20 I'm already hurting now because my gas is off. And I
21 can't understand how they can ask the citizens for \$6.50
22 more. I mean, it's -- it's redundant. I can't
23 understand it. It don't make any sense.

24 You can't get customer service to talk to
25 you like you're a person. They talk to you like you wag

1 tails. I don't wag tails.

2 Like I say, I don't even know where to start
3 because my gas is off. I have to move in with my
4 daughter because I couldn't get my gas back on. I stay
5 in a three bedroom house. So you know, I can't stay in
6 a house without no gas.

7 This winter was not too bad and the winter
8 before. My gas was \$50 a month when I first moved into
9 my house. And then it went up to something like \$375.
10 Then it went up to five-something. And it was like
11 every month, it increases. And like I said, I don't
12 even know where to start because nobody here understands
13 tonight. Laclede gas can do what they want to.

14 I'm through.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.

16 Commissioner Murray, any questions?

17 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions. Thank
18 you.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

20 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you very much. Oh,
22 are there any questions from the attorneys?

23 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions, your honor.

24 I'd just like to say, there are associates here to help
25 you.

1 MS. JENKINS: I tried budget billing. I
2 went through that.

3 MR. PENDERGAST: I'm talking about having
4 assistance in paying --

5 MS. JENKINS: Like I said, I asked the
6 question earlier, they make to keep people poor, because
7 I have to pay the budget 150 to get my gas. That comes
8 out every month. Like in the summertime, if I go over
9 six months, they will not allow you -- you have to do it
10 for a whole year. Because I was thinking it's not fair
11 for me to pay 150 to get my gas, when it's like \$25 a
12 month in the summer. And I understand the whole year it
13 budgets out, but still, there's no grounds for keeping
14 my gas on.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Ms. Jenkins, it might be
16 worth it to -- I don't know if you talked with Laclede
17 Gas, but it might be worth your time to talk with them
18 tonight and see if there's anything new that they could
19 do to help you out. Thank you very much.

20 Jackie Hutchinson?

21 JACQUELINE HUTCHINSON,
22 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
23 as follows:

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Can you spell your name for
25 the court reporter, please? And then give us your

1 comments.

2 MS. HUTCHINSON: J-A-C-Q-U-E-L-I-N-E
3 H-U-T-C-H-I-N-S-O-N.

4 Good evening. I'm Jackie Hutchinson and I'm
5 with the Human Development Corporation Energy Assistance
6 Program. The Human Development Corporation opposes any
7 impact of a rate increase on the low-income, elderly, or
8 disabled families and other families living at or below
9 the poverty level. And I want to give you some
10 statistics to -- as I normally do at rate increase
11 hearings to just enter on the record the impact that
12 rate increases will have on low-income people.

13 According to the 2000 census, 27 percent or
14 approximately 83,000 families in the City of St. Louis
15 live below the poverty index, below \$1338 per month for
16 a family of three. Over 16,000 families received help
17 this past winter and 6,000 families received crisis
18 assistance. Twenty-five percent of those families have
19 just one person in the household that was either elderly
20 or disabled. And approximately 7 percent of the
21 households had at least one child under the age of 18.
22 The average income for the households that we serve is
23 \$645 per month for the average household size of three.
24 And this is well below the poverty index of \$1,338 per
25 month.

1 Many of the families that we see are working
2 poor families, living at minimum wage or near minimum
3 wage.

4 And there are families that pay 6 percent of
5 their income for utilities. Low-income families pay
6 between 16 and 26 percent on average of their income for
7 utilities. The low-income also live in the worst
8 housing, thereby causing them to have the highest bills.

9 And so low-income families are making
10 choices between buying medication, food, or paying their
11 utility bills. And they cannot stand even a small
12 increase. The impact of just a small increase on those
13 families could be devastating.

14 Many of the families are in that cycle of
15 getting the service cut off every spring and -- and
16 doing without services that -- having to seek assistance
17 to get those services restored in the winter. And we're
18 seeing many families that even with all the assistance
19 that we have available through the fellow programs,
20 through the dollar help, and the dollar work program, we
21 cannot come up with the funds necessary to get their
22 services on. And so we are having many families that
23 are living in unsafe houses, using unsafe methods to
24 heat their homes during the winter.

25 To add to that, the funds for the Life

1 Program this past winter were decreased by \$40 million
2 for the State of Missouri. And so there was
3 approximately \$43 million dollars this year where there
4 was \$83 million last year. That means that the funds
5 that we have available just do not go far enough to
6 assist families that are seeking assistance.

7 So I'm asking that the Commission take a
8 very close look at what is necessary to keep rates
9 affordable for all customers and to carefully consider
10 the impact of a rate increase on our vulnerable citizens
11 in Missouri. And if there is to be a rate increase, if
12 you find it necessary to grant a rate increase, that the
13 impact for low-income families is mitigated by expanding
14 the Energy Affordability Program, by expanding the
15 Realization Program, or by considering a discount rate
16 for elderly and disabled or low-income customers. And I
17 think it's appropriate that the utilities be allowed a
18 reasonable rate of recovery for doing such programs.

19 I'd like to thank you all for hearing me and
20 do you have any questions.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Hutchinson.
22 Commissioner Murray?

23 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Good evening,
24 Ms. Hutchinson. I wanted to ask you, the affordability
25 problems that you mentioned tonight, those problems are

1 there prior to the rate increase, would that be your
2 testimony?

3 MS. HUTCHINSON: Yes, the problems are there
4 prior to the rate increase.

5 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: So really, you're
6 asking us to look at, specifically, one class of
7 citizens, in terms of their affordability of the
8 utilities in general. Is that -- you're not asking us
9 not to grant an increase if it's needed, you're just
10 asking us to look at one class of citizens and how they
11 would be treated.

12 MS. HUTCHINSON: Yes. To make sure that
13 their rates are affordable for all citizens. The impact
14 of the rate increase for low-income households and the
15 elderly. Even though they're considered the same class
16 of customers in Missouri, in other states, they consider
17 low-income a special class of customers and the disabled
18 and elderly, others that do not have the ability to
19 afford utilities and so there are programs like great
20 discount programs in other states, where they have
21 recognized that low-income customers have to be treated
22 differently than all customers and there are rate
23 discount programs, affordability programs.

24 And I'm asking that the affordability
25 program that was started in the last rate increase be

1 expanded. And that we be allowed to impact more
2 low-income families with that program and that the
3 program be redesigned so that it is simple to administer
4 and that the impact can be measured easier than the
5 program that was rolled out in the last rate increase.

6 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: And who do you suggest
7 that we pass those costs on to?

8 MS. HUTCHINSON: I suggest that the rates
9 would be covered through the rate payers.

10 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Through the other rate
11 payers?

12 MS. HUTCHINSON: Absolutely. I mean, I'm
13 including the commercial and the industrial customers.

14 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: And the other
15 residential customers, as well?

16 MS. HUTCHINSON: Absolutely. Because if
17 shared by all, then it's going to be a very, very small
18 amount. I mean, you're seeing programs like this in
19 other states where the cost is less than one dollar a
20 month per customer. Some programs, as small as -- as 30
21 cents per customer. So the recovery is a lot less than
22 what is being asked for a rate increase.

23 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Thank you.

24 MS. HUTCHINSON: Might I add that I think
25 that some of the costs should be borne by the

1 shareholders of the company and that they should -- it
2 should not be just the -- just the rate payers, but some
3 of the costs of it should be borne by the shareholders.

4 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Thank you for your
5 testimony.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Commissioner
7 Appling?

8 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Hi, Jackie.

9 MS. HUTCHINSON: Hello there.

10 COMMISSIONER APPLING: You and I have had
11 some long conversations about St. Louis and rates and
12 all the rest of the programs. You had some numbers
13 there. You said 83 million last year and it was cut to
14 43 million?

15 MS. HUTCHINSON: That's correct.

16 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Okay. I just wanted
17 to get those numbers right. Thank you very much. And
18 thank you for coming out. I appreciate you coming here,
19 okay?

20 MS. HUTCHINSON: Thank you.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Do you have any questions of
22 Ms. Hutchinson?

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have a question.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Well, sir, I can't allow
25 anyone but the attorneys to ask a question. You have to

1 wait to come up and testify. Thank you Ms. Hutchinson.

2 Dexine Gibson. She's not here tonight.

3 Adam Schillinger?

4 ADAM SCHILLINGER,

5 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies

6 as follows:

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Would you please

8 spell your name for us and I want you to speak into the

9 microphone.

10 MR. SCHILLINGER: My name is spelled Adam,

11 A-D-A-M, Schillinger, S-C-H-I-L-L-I-N-G-E-R.

12 My first comment is in regards to what the

13 quiet gentleman to my left was saying earlier, that the

14 best way to reduce rates is the conservation of energy.

15 However, this rate increase being related to

16 non-consumption-related charges, the conservation would

17 be necessary to keep the bills at the same level that

18 they are now, as opposed to lowering the bills. I have

19 to save \$6.50 worth of gas every month, just to make up

20 for the rate for the services I don't use.

21 That being said, Laclede Gas owes me money.

22 I'm sure they owe everyone in this room money. Well, I

23 called Laclede Gas up and said I was moving and I would

24 need my gas turned on. They told me it would be \$320

25 before they would turn my gas on. \$320 is a deposit,

1 which I'm sure is being held in case one month I'm not
2 able to pay my bills. For that month, if I'm not able
3 to pay my bills, at least Laclede Gas is going to get at
4 least \$320 which covers my monthly bill, but I don't
5 know if it covers anyone else's bill. How many people
6 in this room aren't covered by that much?

7 Along the lines of that money, when I give
8 someone money with the impression that they will give it
9 back at some point in the future, I consider it a loan
10 and the same is true with people who have loaned me
11 money. Now, if I -- if I loan someone money, I normally
12 would expect to charge interest, which I don't. And I
13 assume Laclede Gas appreciates my generosity for letting
14 them hang on to my \$320 until the time that I terminate
15 my services.

16 (Applause.)

17 Now, as Laclede Gas is a publicly owned
18 company, I understand that they have responsibilities to
19 their shareholders and to the public, as well as people.
20 But as a corporation, they have the responsibility to
21 their shareholders. I would speculate that if I had my
22 \$320, let's say that I invested it in stock in Laclede
23 Gas. As of May 18th, Laclede Gas was trading at \$31.43
24 a share. With my \$320, I could buy ten shares of
25 Laclede Gas. Last year, Laclede Gas' dividend was \$1.41

1 a share. If I had ten shares of Laclede Gas, instead of
2 Laclede Gas having the \$320 of my money, they would have
3 paid me \$14.10 last year.

4 If I were a shareholder, I would appreciate
5 Laclede Gas attempting to keep the return of equity at
6 9.9 percent. According to information available from
7 Standard & Poor's Morningstars, Laclede Gas' return on
8 equity for the past five years has on average been 10.9
9 percent. With last year's -- last year was 12.9
10 percent, the highest in five years. So if I were indeed
11 a shareholder of Laclede Gas, I should wonder why rates
12 would need to be increased in order to maintain the
13 return of my equity. However, I am not a shareholder of
14 Laclede Gas, so I cannot ask these questions at the
15 shareholder meetings. I can only ask them here at the
16 public hearing or wonder about them if I were a
17 shareholder.

18 And that's all I have to say.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Mr. Schillinger.
20 Commissioner Murray, any questions?

21 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions, thank
22 you.

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

24 COMMISSIONER APPLING: How are you doing,
25 Adam?

1 MR. SCHILLINGER: I'm doing fine.

2 COMMISSIONER APPLING: You're doing fine.

3 What part of the city do you live in?

4 MR. SCHILLINGER: I live in South St. Louis.

5 COMMISSIONER APPLING: South. How old is
6 your home?

7 MR. SCHILLINGER: I rent a building that is
8 probably as old as my grandparents.

9 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Do you have any idea
10 of what the installation is? I'm just trying to get a
11 feel for the installation. You may have told me that,
12 but I'm trying to get a feel. Do you have any idea
13 about the installation in the building?

14 MR. SCHILLINGER: The installation for the
15 furnaces?

16 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No. For instance,
17 the ceiling and the walls.

18 MR. SCHILLINGER: No, I do not.

19 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Okay. Thank you very
20 much for coming. I appreciate your comments.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Are there any questions from
22 the attorneys?

23 MR. PENDERGAST: Mr. Schillinger, are you
24 aware that Laclede does pay interest on the customer's
25 deposit?

1 MR. SCHILLINGER: How much interest do you
2 pay me?

3 MR. PENDERGAST: It's about 9 percent right
4 now. So I just wanted to make sure that you're aware
5 that we are doing that.

6 MR. SCHILLINGER: Well, 9 percent of 320,
7 that is 28.80 or roundabouts.

8 MR. PENDERGAST: You're faster at math than
9 I am.

10 MR. SCHILLINGER: So if you pay me 28.80 a
11 year, but you want to raise my bills by 6.50 a year,
12 6.50 times 12 is about \$75, I think, roughly. So yeah,
13 my math is probably better than yours, but it still
14 comes out that I'm paying more.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you very much for your
16 comments.

17 Julia Allen? Sorry Ms. Allen, I actually
18 skipped you.

19 MS. ALLEN: That's okay.

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: I apologize.

21 JULIA ALLEN,
22 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
23 as follows:

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
25 spell your name and then give us your comments.

1 MS. ALLEN: Julia, J-U-L-I-A, Allen,
2 A-L-L-E-N.

3 My name is Julia Allen and I'm a social
4 worker. And I work with the elderly and the disabled.
5 And I'm just here to say I think a \$6.50 increase for a
6 gas bill for the people that I work with will put a big
7 hardship on them. A lot of these people can't afford
8 prescriptions or a lot of these people don't know --
9 they run out of food before the end of the month.

10 In addition to high gas bills, they live in
11 older houses and a lot of the people -- and I think that
12 they're an invisible population -- they really are
13 disabled. They cannot get out of their homes. They
14 live alone. So they don't have anybody to speak with
15 them or they don't -- they might not even have a sixth
16 grade education so that they find out about all of these
17 nice programs that people are talking about. They
18 missed out -- they miss out on these programs
19 completely.

20 I think the \$6.50 increase would make a
21 difference for the people to determine whether they're
22 going to have medicine, whether they're going to eat,
23 whether they're going to have gas, or whether they're
24 going to have lights.

25 I make home visits. I go into these

1 people's homes. And I see -- we see their living
2 conditions. Sometimes I get four or five calls a week
3 for people who just need to talk with somebody about how
4 high their gas bill is, what help is available. Then
5 you have your people, like I said, prescription drugs
6 are even going up and I think because everything is
7 going up, you're putting a hardship on the disabled and
8 the elderly.

9 Most of the people that I see, their average
10 income is around \$500 a month. I'm talking about poor
11 people. I'm talking about people who don't have access
12 and these people are living alone in their homes because
13 they don't want to move and they want to remain
14 independent. And that's what I think society is saying.
15 They want to remain in their homes and they want to
16 remain independent for as long as they possibly can.

17 If you add \$6.50 to the rate increase to the
18 people that I work with, it's just going to put a bigger
19 burden on them.

20 And that's all I have to say.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you very much,
22 Ms. Allen. Commissioner Murray?

23 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Good evening. The
24 people that you serve, you said that sometimes they're
25 not even aware of the low-income programs that are

1 available?

2 MS. ALLEN: Most of those people usually get
3 -- my people, okay? They don't know about the crisis --
4 crisis program or the dollar help program. But even --
5 even if they did, they don't have anybody who can get
6 those programs to them.

7 But what I've really found is that most of
8 these -- most of the people I work with, they don't --
9 they aren't aware of -- a lot of people aren't aware of
10 these programs.

11 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: But as you serve them,
12 do you make them aware?

13 MS. ALLEN: I make them aware. I call the
14 gas company on their behalf. I call the utility
15 companies on their behalf. I call Centers of Medicare
16 and Medicaid on their behalf. I do whatever I can to
17 get the information to them. And I'm only one person.

18 And the organization that I work with, we
19 have close to 3,200 people who are homebound that we
20 provide a meal for everyday. I can't get to all of
21 those people, so I get to the ones that I can. Some of
22 them, I just luck up on. Like I was in a gentleman's
23 house today who was having some problems with his
24 utility. And what amazed me was that the utility
25 company had enough money to contract out somebody to

1 come out and turn that man's service off, but I told
2 that man, I didn't care what he did, he could not turn
3 that man's service off. That man was in a wheelchair,
4 he was 73 years old. If I had not come by there and I
5 think it was just an act of God that sent me by there
6 that day, because I was there to do a circ -- what they
7 call a circuit break, to help him to get some additional
8 income to pay gas or utility people. If I had not been
9 there, he would have been sitting in that house in that
10 wheelchair by himself. Because the first thing I asked
11 him, do you have some place to go and he said no.

12 So I just think that putting, you know, that
13 asking for a rate increase would just really affect
14 low-income, elderly, and the disabled.

15 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: About how many people
16 do you visit?

17 MS. ALLEN: I go out -- I might see six to
18 ten people a week. I usually -- I go out just about
19 every day, somebody needs a call. And most of the
20 people are -- they're in wheelchairs, they're on
21 walkers, they can't get out so I see this every day. I
22 see it just about every day.

23 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Thank you.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.

25 Commissioner Appling?

1 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I have no questions.
2 I just want to say, Ms. Allen, thank you very much for
3 coming out. Thank you very much for your comments.
4 Keep doing what you're doing, okay? As long as you can.

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: I just wanted to say to be
6 sure that you take one of our consumer complaint
7 hotline, the little pink cards, in case you have any
8 questions.

9 Are there any questions from the attorneys?

10 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Allen.

12 Faye Combs?

13 FAYE COMBS,
14 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
15 as follows:

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Will you please spell your
17 name and then make your comments.

18 MS. COMBS: Faye Combs, Faye, F-A-Y-E,
19 Combs, C-O-M-B-S.

20 My testimony this evening is why does the
21 utility companies, who are not struggling to pay their
22 bills, who are not in the black, need an increase, when
23 we are stuck with paying them \$1,000 a month, when we
24 are stuck with paying our bills whether they cut our
25 utilities off or not.

1 I know this past October, my daughter paid
2 her bills, paid her bills, and they cut it off anyhow.
3 And I sat for five days. The arrogance of the utility
4 companies. Five days on the telephone, trying to get
5 them to come out there and turn the gas back on after
6 receiving over \$1000. And I'm not even going to
7 complain about the poor. I'm telling you what happened
8 to us that scuffle to pay the bill. The arrogance.

9 Five days on the phone. They gave me every
10 excuse. When they finally showed up, after sitting all
11 day to get this gas on, it was ten o'clock at night,
12 October of 2006. 1467 Tamm. This was for a small
13 little shop. My daughter's house, two small children.
14 Paid this \$1000. Paid it. They came ten o'clock at
15 night, when they got there to turn the gas on.

16 I don't owe Laclede Gas, but my gas is off.
17 I have a 20-something dollar bill. Do you think they
18 have called and said, Ms. Combs, we cut off the gas at
19 the wrong house, but we'll come back in and put you back
20 on. They have not done that. The arrogance of Laclede
21 Gas. That is arrogance.

22 Even when we pay our bills, their customer
23 service is awful. They are not in the black. They're
24 not missing meals to pay their shareholders or their
25 employees. My daughter's little shop was without gas

1 five days after she paid the bill. The arrogance.

2 How dare you people consider giving them a
3 raise, the way they treat human beings and I'm not even
4 talking about poor folks, I'm just talking about people
5 that pay their bills.

6 For over 20 years, I lived in this home.
7 They never once had to cut off my utilities, but they
8 cut them off because my daughter owed them downstairs.
9 But did they say, Ms. Combs, can we come in and turn
10 your gas on? But baby, look, I was born in a cold water
11 flat and I told my daughter, I said don't worry about
12 it. Boil us some water. We got hot water. We'll cook
13 our food on the electric stove. We'll keep going. But
14 the arrogance.

15 That's why they don't deserve an increase.
16 If they had taken care of their people, if they had
17 cared about the poor people that had died, frozen to
18 death in houses, that didn't have any heat on, we
19 wouldn't have cared about them having a rate increase.
20 But what about their arrogance? What about them not
21 letting anything lighten up? They don't lack anything.
22 Their shareholders are paid. Their bills are paid.
23 They're not in the black. So why give them an increase?

24 Check out their bills and see if they
25 deserve an increase after the way they treated us. We

1 struggle to pay these thousands and thousands of
2 dollars.

3 And I remember just as good, two other gas
4 people came down the street. I'm sitting there all day
5 with my daughter's two little kids and they turned
6 around and left. After waiting all day in the cold.
7 And I got back on the phone and I said two gas men just
8 came here and left these babies in this cold. They
9 didn't send anybody back until the next day. The
10 arrogance.

11 They don't deserve an increase. They don't
12 need it. But the arrogance.

13 (Applause.)

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Wait just a minute,
15 Ms. Combs. Commissioner Murray, did you have any
16 questions?

17 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: I don't.

18 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

19 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Thank you for your
20 comments.

21 (Applause.)

22 JUDGE DIPPELL: Any questions from the other
23 attorneys? Thank you, Ms. Combs.

24 Truinessia Combs? Is that -- am I saying
25 that correctly?

1 TRUENESSIA COMBS,
2 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
3 as follows:

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you spell your name
5 and then give us your comments?

6 MS. COMBS: My name is Truenessia Combs,
7 that's T-R-U-E-N-E-S-S-I-A, Combs, C-O-M-B-S.

8 I made a comment earlier concerning taking
9 our resources and going elsewhere. One thing that I've
10 come to understand as people, not as blacks, not as
11 whites, not as rich or poor, we all have the gift of
12 gab. If you buy the -- the best car, you're going to
13 tell somebody, right? If you find the best hair
14 stylist, you're going to tell somebody about them.

15 I've gone up and commented about what would
16 be your losses, have you-all ever considered the losses
17 of your company if we all, as people, up and decided to
18 take our business elsewhere? It's called propane. It's
19 called electricity. There has never been, before
20 Laclede Gas came into business, there has never been a
21 need for natural gas, because they had wood burning
22 stoves. They had things like that.

23 This is four months. This is four months.
24 And I do this every, every, every, every year, since
25 I've moved here, back into my mama's, maybe a

1 hundred-year-old house, on the south side of St. Louis.
2 I'm not saying that I'm struggling. I'm not saying that
3 I'm the poor or the poorest. I do work hard for what I
4 have. But when you say that you have a program in
5 existence for those that need just a little help and it
6 doesn't work for them, that's a problem.

7 I have been on the budget billing or
8 prorated billing or whatever you want to call it since
9 2001. I have two children. I'm only 27 years old, mind
10 you. Okay. This is every year. Four months. My bill
11 is now \$2,638.04. Four months. And I take my income
12 taxes that I get back every year and I pay this off.
13 Every year.

14 It's not that I don't pay it, it's just that
15 I can't afford to pay what I'm being charged for four
16 months. This is four months, mind you. \$2,000. So I'm
17 not saying that I want you to consider the poorest. I
18 want you to consider the -- I'm not saying -- I'm just
19 saying I pay the bills. Whether I pay it now -- because
20 I'm living without gas in my home and I think I can
21 survive right now without gas. I think I can do that.

22 But a rate increase for whoever, I don't
23 believe would be the best idea. My mother said the
24 arrogance. That's what she said over and over again,
25 just the arrogance of the company and the non-chalantness

1 of the way that they respond to a need or respond to
2 anything that is addressed to them. They don't care.
3 They don't care.

4 The lady from HDC came up and guess what,
5 you gave good points for what she said. But as soon as
6 you were done, she shot you down. She said, so who do
7 you want us to consider. Who, meaning that we don't
8 care about none of you. What about the other customers
9 that we've got? But I'm going to tell you this. Those
10 lovely mansions on Lindell, those lovely houses out in
11 Chesterfield, none of them are sitting here. Why?
12 Because they don't have a problem with what they're
13 doing. They don't care. They can afford it. They're
14 just not going to come. They don't care about what
15 you're saying and they don't care about us either. None
16 of them live around the corner from you. None of them
17 live around the corner from me. They don't care.

18 So what you need to do is prove to them they
19 do not need an increase because none of them have
20 struggled to pay anybody. I want them to lay their
21 bills out and see if any of them are unpaid. I want to
22 do that. They won't do that because they don't have
23 that problem.

24 They need to know that there are people out
25 here that actually do care about us and we're thinking

1 about leaving. But you have to understand that if we
2 took our business elsewhere, what would be the -- the
3 ending result of this company? What would you do then?

4 We don't want to resort to that. We don't
5 want to, because Laclede is our source of energy for so
6 many years. We don't want to do that. I think it would
7 hurt. I think it would. Because there are more of us.
8 There are more of us.

9 I just want you to take it into
10 consideration. I know you don't care. But I do want
11 you to take it into consideration.

12 That's all I have to say. Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.

15 Commissioner Murray?

16 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Ms. Combs?

17 MS. COMBS: Yes.

18 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: I would just like to
19 tell you that we do care. We care about all of the
20 customers and we have to balance all of the interests.
21 And when I ask a question like that, it's simply doing
22 the job that we are charged with doing. And it is
23 caring about everyone.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

25 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Any questions from the
2 attorneys?

3 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Combs.
5 Erma Crawford?

6 ERMA CRAWFORD,
7 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
8 as follows:

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you spell your name
10 for the court reporter, please?

11 MS. CRAWFORD: My name is Erma Crawford. My
12 first name is E-R-M-A and my last name is
13 C-R-A-W-F-O-R-D.

14 Okay. My testimony is I stay in a two
15 family flat and I moved my life from upstairs to
16 downstairs. I come through after I paid the last bill
17 this winter. They said, you're even, Ms. Crawford.
18 This was like July 3rd or something. Okay. The next
19 bill I got was November. But the next bill I got was
20 \$1000 and when I moved downstairs, I was using a gas
21 stove and hot water and that was it, but I still had to
22 pay that \$1000 before I could get some more service. I
23 took my time paying it because I didn't have it.

24 But my statement is why did I have to do
25 that. I feel that I need some kind of reimbursement for

1 gas because I paid every penny of it before it was
2 turned back on.

3 JUDGE DIPPELL: Ms. Crawford, let me make
4 sure I understand what you're saying. You talked to the
5 company and you thought you were paid up --

6 MS. CRAWFORD: I was. They said you're paid
7 up, you're even. I wasn't downstairs. So I went over
8 and showed them my utilities was zero. Zero. I didn't
9 have no problems with the electric. But the gas -- this
10 gas bill that I got was \$1000. So what I believe is the
11 people downstairs was using the gas and they put it on
12 me. Even my landlord called and said this isn't her
13 bill. They didn't listen to my landlord.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: I think I'd like you to --
15 if you haven't already talked to one of our consumer
16 services people back in the back and they can help -- it
17 sounds like you might need some help getting that
18 straightened out.

19 MS. CRAWFORD: Okay.

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Murray, do you
21 have any questions?

22 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: I just had the same
23 thing.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

25 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Be sure and talk to
2 one of the two ladies back there in the back.

3 MS. CRAWFORD: All right. But I talked to
4 Laclede Gas and they sent somebody out. They said the
5 gas was coming to the house before I started out. So it
6 was another house's gas that was coming to the house. I
7 couldn't understand that.

8 And then -- and then after the \$1000 bill, I
9 got another -- I got another bill because I had -- in
10 the summer, I had turned it off again, but it came to
11 \$500. I said what is this and they said -- they came
12 out and said -- I said you are going to have to pay for
13 some of this.

14 Okay. My landlord said, I'll pay. But he
15 couldn't pay my gas bill. Okay. I called them again
16 and said my landlord said he'll pay it. They said, no.
17 We already sent a meter reader to read it.

18 So I went over the cold weather rule or the
19 gas rule and I still can't get around \$170 every month.

20 I try to pay to keep my bill down every
21 month, but I don't feel -- somebody else's gas that I
22 wasn't using or didn't come in the house.

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Please talk to Ms. Gray
24 there and we want to make sure that everything is done
25 correctly.

1 MS. CRAWFORD: Thank you.

2 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.

3 Willie Conway? Ella Brown? Would you
4 please come forward.

5 ELLA BROWN,
6 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
7 as follows:

8 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. I'm going to
9 need you to speak into the microphone. Please spell
10 your name and then give us your comments.

11 MS. BROWN: My name is Ella, E-L-L-A, M.
12 B-R-O-W-N.

13 JUDGE DIPPELL: Can you pull that microphone
14 just a little closer? Thank you.

15 MS. BROWN: I came to this meeting because
16 I'm concerned about the difference in my gas bill from
17 one month to the other and from one year to the other.
18 I can pay my gas bill, but I'm still concerned about the
19 amount that has been charged.

20 Even though I live in a three story
21 building, the third floor is completely closed off.
22 Only two rooms on the second floor do I have open and on
23 the first floor, I have all the grates taped. So I'm
24 concerned about why my bills are so much. And in the
25 summertime, they're so very nothing.

1 And that's why I came to this meeting
2 because I thought there might be some insight as to
3 what's going on at my residence.

4 For example, in December of 2004, my bill
5 was \$211.92. That was in December of 2004. In January
6 of 2005, it jumped to 593.76. I'm not poor. I can pay
7 my bills. I paid my bills, but I'm just concerned about
8 the difference in the amount, just because it's a cold
9 time of year. And when I compare the 12th month of '06,
10 the bill was 541.84. The 12th month of 2004 was 211.92.
11 And my house is still the same. I haven't changed at
12 all.

13 So I'm just concerned about what's going on
14 with the way the bills are being, you know, evaluated.
15 And in the summertime -- on September -- the 12th of
16 September, my bill was \$24.91. So that tells you that
17 I'm not using that much gas. And then in December, this
18 is the same year, in December, it jumped to 541.84.

19 And my entire third floor is sealed off. I
20 taped all the grates on the first floor. And I still
21 have these bills. And that's my concern, the difference
22 in the bills and the time of year and this kind of
23 thing.

24 In January of this year, my bill was 553 and
25 in March it jumped to \$806. In May it was down to \$238.

1 Something is wrong. Maybe it's me. I don't know. But
2 I would appreciate it if I could get some help or some
3 suggestions from the company as to my bills.

4 Thank you.

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Let me ask you
6 one question. Do you have a gas furnace, I assume, to
7 heat your home?

8 MS. BROWN: Yes. And I have -- I have a
9 young man who is a graduate of Rankin Tech and he comes
10 and checks my furnace and all.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: I'm going to suggest that
12 you also go and talk to one of our consumer service
13 representatives.

14 MS. BROWN: It's not an old furnace.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: I'm going to suggest that
16 you talk to either one of our reps or one of the company
17 reps and they will be able to explain to you how those
18 amounts are calculated and maybe explain those
19 fluctuations to you so you at least have an
20 understanding of how it works.

21 Commissioner Murray?

22 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Just one. Have you
23 attempted to contact the company to ask for an
24 explanation?

25 MS. BROWN: No, I haven't because when I did

1 before I didn't get any consideration so I just let it
2 go. When I had the opportunity to attend the meeting, I
3 jumped at it.

4 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: This would be a good
5 opportunity to talk to them.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

7 COMMISSIONER APPLING: How are you doing,
8 Ms. Brown?

9 MS. BROWN: I'm good.

10 COMMISSIONER APPLING: You have a good deal
11 of difference in your bill.

12 MS. BROWN: Yeah. You know, it's so strange
13 how it goes down to almost nothing in the summer and
14 then it goes, at least this year, really, because it
15 really hasn't been cold, not a terrible St. Louis
16 winter, as far as I'm concerned. And I've been here
17 since 1944. And I came from the south.

18 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I thought you came
19 from Mississippi. Am I right?

20 MS. BROWN: I came from Texas.

21 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Texas, okay. Did you
22 have somebody professionally zone your house? You know,
23 when you say you cut off the third floor, is it -- did
24 you have somebody come out and professionally do that?

25 MS. BROWN: No. I just don't use the third

1 floor. I just don't use the third floor.

2 COMMISSIONER APPLING: So you have a
3 separate --

4 MS. BROWN: I just close the grates on the
5 third floor.

6 COMMISSIONER APPLING: That doesn't always
7 do it. I'll just mention that. Someone from Laclede,
8 because I want to follow up on your specific situation.
9 Mr. Pendergast, will you get someone to specifically
10 help Ms. Brown? Because I want to follow-up on this.

11 MS. BROWN: Thank you.

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: Were there any questions
13 from the attorneys?

14 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Fannie King? Is it King?

16 FANNIE KING,
17 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
18 as follows:

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: If you could spell your name
20 for the court reporter and then give your comments and
21 try to speak into the microphone. If you need to take
22 it off the stand, that's okay too.

23 MS. KING: My name is Fannie King,
24 F-A-N-N-I-E K-I-N-G and I am a Laclede Gas consumer.
25 And I would just like to put on the record that for the

1 last three years, my gas bill -- my gas has been cut off
2 for six months out of each year. It's only been on for
3 three months out of the year because I couldn't afford
4 to pay the bill.

5 I tried the budget planning. They put me on
6 a budget for \$300 a month. I'm on a fixed income. I
7 couldn't pay it and pay my other bills, my medication,
8 and so forth. I couldn't do it. So I called the
9 consumer board and I tried to explain to them that my
10 gas was only on for three months out of the year -- six
11 months out of the year and after reviewing the budget, I
12 would always owe them \$1000 a month for the bills. So
13 these last three months, my bills have been \$500 each
14 month.

15 My residence is a four room home, one story
16 and a basement, gas furnace, a water heater, and a
17 stove. That's all I have. And I would like to know how
18 can I come up with a bill for \$500 each month and I'm
19 conservative because I know I can't pay it, so I don't
20 use it.

21 And I have talked to some representative at
22 Laclede Gas and they say I owe it. So I talked to the
23 consumer board and asked them to investigate it for, you
24 know, and they determined that Ms. King, you didn't pay
25 in February. I didn't pay in February, because my gas

1 wasn't on in February. It's only on in June, July, and
2 August and they cut it off. And I pay it up and have it
3 cut back on each July. And that's how I've been
4 surviving with Laclede Gas Company for the past few
5 years.

6 My bills have been high, but never, you
7 know, we never use the gas. And I'm assuming that maybe
8 some of the neighbors have been stealing gas and they
9 charge me for their bills.

10 So that was all I have to say. I just
11 wanted to put that on the record. And thank you and
12 you-all have a nice day and I'm so concerned that you
13 all care. And I know that you-all will investigate and
14 treat each and every one of us equally important. Thank
15 you and have a nice night.

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, ma'am. If you
17 still have some concerns, I'd like you to also --

18 MS. KING: I talked to the --

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Commissioner Murray?

20 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions. Thank
21 you.

22 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

23 COMMISSIONER APPLING: How are you doing?

24 MS. KING: All right. How are you?

25 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Thank you very much

1 for coming out. I don't have any questions. I spoke to
2 you a few minutes ago, but thank you very much for
3 coming here, okay? Thank you.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Any questions?

5 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: All right. Thank you,
7 Ms. King.

8 Joan Lane?

9 JOAN LANE,

10 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
11 as follows:

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
13 spell your name and then give us your comments.

14 MS. LANE: J-O-A-N, Joan, L-A-N-E, Lane.

15 Okay. Good evening. First of all, I want
16 to go on record that Laclede Gas should not have any
17 increase at all. I think it's an audacity for them to
18 even ask for a raise and for 6.50, it's going to
19 probably be \$15 more because every time they ask
20 anything, it jumps and I've been in my house for 14
21 years and when I started it was \$50 and \$60 and no more
22 than \$100 a month. Now, my bills are -- and I'm going
23 to start with January, \$281, February \$386, March \$499,
24 April \$333, May \$323.

25 Now, some of that is a balance left from the

1 other months that I could not afford to pay. But what
2 I'm trying to say, I do not have much larger mortgage
3 bill than this gas bill. And that is ridiculous for you
4 to expect an average person to pay these kinds of rates
5 and have the nerve to ask for an increase. Most people
6 cannot afford \$300 gas bills from November through May.
7 And as you can see, that is almost \$2000 that you are
8 paying for utilities -- only gas. I'm not talking about
9 your insurance, your mortgage, your food, all the other
10 things you have to do to just survive and live.

11 And it is very, very un-proportioned to the
12 bills and the gas company's bills. No other bill is
13 that high. And I don't understand how they can get away
14 with it and you say you care about us all.

15 Is everybody in Missouri paying these kind
16 of bills? That's what I want to know. Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you Ms. Lane. I'm
19 sure that our staff will probably be able to answer your
20 last question about what other gas companies in Missouri
21 pay. I don't have the numbers myself.

22 MS. LANE: Well, you heard tonight how many
23 people have a \$500 to \$1000 bills. So this should give
24 you an idea of what we are going through as common
25 citizens in St. Louis. Thank you.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Let me see if there are any
2 questions for you. Commissioner Murray?

3 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: I don't have any
4 questions.

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

6 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Let me just ask one. How
8 big of a house do you have?

9 MS. LANE: I have a five rooms on the first
10 floor and I have a couple of rooms upstairs.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. And --

12 MS. LANE: And I have what's called hot air
13 -- not hot air. Radiator heat.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay.

15 MS. LANE: And when I first moved in that
16 house, it was so much more reasonable. And I put the
17 thermostat on 71 degrees so I am not overheating the
18 house.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: And do you have all gas
20 appliances?

21 MS. LANE: No. I have electric stove. So
22 the only thing I have is the furnace and hot water
23 heater.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Thank you. Are there
25 any questions from the attorneys?

1 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

2 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you very much,
3 Ms. Lane.

4 Maggie Williams?

5 MAGGIE WILLIAMS,
6 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
7 as follows:

8 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
9 spell your name and then give us your comments.

10 MS. WILLIAMS: Maggie, M-A-G-G-I-E, last
11 name Williams, W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S.

12 I'm here because I'm a concerned citizen and
13 I'm here because I received a notice through the mail
14 regarding this meeting. And so I would like to thank
15 the ones that are responsible for getting the mail out.

16 And I'm on a fixed income. And therefore, I
17 ask Missouri Public Service Commission to reconsider and
18 reject the proposal set forth for Laclede Gas Company.
19 For some, the increase of rate will cause a hardship on
20 them. As for others, some are on disability, the
21 low-income, and the no income. And a lot of people are
22 out of work right now.

23 So over the years, I have observed on my
24 bill, it doesn't matter whether this is at the peak of
25 the winter season. It doesn't matter whether you use

1 your -- your gas little or if you use it much. Your
2 bill is still going to be high. You know, just because
3 of that.

4 So therefore, my testimony is that if at all
5 possible, that you will not give a rate increase,
6 especially a 6.5 percent. Thank you.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you Ms. Williams.
8 Commissioner Murray?

9 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions. Thank
10 you.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

12 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Ms. Williams, I don't
13 have any questions other than saying thank you for
14 coming tonight and thank you for your comments.

15 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Are there any questions from
17 the attorneys?

18 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Williams.

20 Virginia Clark? Mattie Clark? Looks like
21 A. S. Or O. S. Harris? C. Galloway?

22 CARNEBRA GALLOWAY,
23 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
24 as follows:

25 JUDGE DIPPELL: Please spell your name for

1 us and give us your comments.

2 MS. GALLOWAY: My first name is Carnebra,
3 C-A-R-N-E-B-R-A, last name, Galloway, G-A-L-L-O-W-A-Y.

4 Okay. Missourians already have it poor. We
5 only just -- was just approved for a dollar raise to
6 minimum wage. Okay. I feel like the gas prices are
7 already four dollars a gallon, that's for regular gas,
8 it's the worst you can put in your car. And then the
9 miscellaneous items that we buy, household items,
10 clothes, shoes, things like that for the children that,
11 you know, we have is already too high. Taxes are high.

12 Pretty much what I'm saying is the cost of
13 living, period, is high. For you-all to actually bring
14 the -- the fact that you want to raise our rates 6.5
15 percent is ridiculous.

16 My grandmother, she was cheated out of her
17 full retirement money, so she has to go on a monthly
18 budget. She couldn't be here, but she has to go on a
19 monthly budget every month. She complains about the
20 fact that, you know, she can't buy the things that she
21 really needs. You know, generic medicine and things
22 like that because of the fact that she has to pay her
23 bills. And she doesn't like -- she's not the type of
24 person who pays a little. She pays all of it.

25 And a lot of our elderly people are dying,

1 not because -- not because they don't want to pay their
2 bills. They can't pay their bills. In the summertime,
3 they pass out and faint or whatever from the exhaustion
4 from the heat. It's not because they don't want to turn
5 on their air. It's because they can't afford to. And
6 to raise these prices is ridiculous. That's why they're
7 passing away. That's why the people who are in need
8 can't get the help. Because so many other people are
9 trying to help themselves.

10 We need to come together and stand together
11 in the United States and we should stand together. We
12 should be united, not divided, as people. I mean, to me
13 this thing's like certain type -- certain groups are
14 being targeted, you know, in a lot of ways. And I feel
15 like I am a part of the groups -- of one of the groups,
16 whatever you want to call it, minority or whatever,
17 that's being targeted to being put in a place where we
18 can't afford to live.

19 Schools are being combined. That means that
20 the children are not going to be able to receive the
21 proper education that they need to actually succeed to
22 actually pay the bills, the higher bills, that you are
23 come up with in the future.

24 I believe that we should -- if you-all want
25 to -- if you-all want to raise the rates, please bring

1 it down a little bit, at least. Thank you.

2 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Galloway.

3 Commissioner Appling, do you have any questions?

4 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. Are there any
6 questions from the attorneys? Thank you very much.

7 MS. GALLOWAY: Thank you.

8 JUDGE DIPPELL: Kathleen Covington?

9 KATHLEEN COVINGTON,

10 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
11 as follows:

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: Please spell your name and
13 then give us your comments.

14 MS. COVINGTON: Kathleen, K-A-T-H-L-E-E-N,
15 Covington, C-O-V-I-N-G-T-O-N.

16 My comment, basically, is I do not think
17 Laclede Gas deserves to have a rate increase.

18 Basically, like the other people have said before me,
19 the arrogance of the company and the people who
20 represent you over the telephone.

21 And the other comment that I want to make, I
22 think it's a travesty that this room is not overflowing
23 with people who are outraged and I can only say that if
24 they read Sunday's paper, Jeff Tomich put the wrong
25 dates. And I sent him an e-mail and brought it to his

1 attention. I called Laclede Gas to confirm what is the
2 actual date. This is what they do in the black
3 community. See some people are going to show up here on
4 the 29th, expecting you guys to be here. And I asked
5 him to make sure that he verified these dates and that
6 he put some kind of corrective notice in the newspaper
7 so that people would know.

8 And I think that's the only reason why
9 people are not here in droves. Because anybody who has
10 to pay your bills are to be highly mad, lining this
11 room, to voice their opinion to say, no, no, no rate
12 increase. Not at all.

13 (Applause.)

14 And the other thing that I have a bone to
15 pick with Laclede Gas is my gas has been cut off in a
16 year. The heating element on my stove is out. Only
17 because we smelled gas did Laclede send a couple guys to
18 our home. They checked it out. They said the heating
19 element is out. Call Laclede Gas and see if they'll
20 allow us to come back and repair it. They said no
21 because the bill -- because they had to disconnect us
22 twice in a 12 month period, so no, they won't fix our
23 heating element. And I think that's a travesty.

24 We're on the budget program. We failed to
25 pay our bill, but we've been consistent and I called two

1 days ago and asked since we've been persistent with
2 paying this \$260-something a month, can we get our
3 heating element fixed on the stove. I was put on hold.
4 He comes back. No, ma'am, we cannot. Because of how
5 you paid your bills. That's -- that's everybody in the
6 City of St. Louis.

7 And I personally think people in the City of
8 St. Louis pay higher gas bills than people in the
9 county. Thank you.

10 JUDGE DIPPELL: Ms. Covington, can I ask
11 you, because this is the first I've heard of the
12 newspaper problem. Can you tell me what newspaper --

13 MS. COVINGTON: It's the Post Dispatch.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: It was the Post Dispatch?

15 MS. COVINGTON: Yes.

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: It was Sunday, did you say?

17 MS. COVINGTON: Yes. You can have it. I'm
18 finished with it.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Did you get a --

20 MS. COVINGTON: We got a card. We got a
21 card.

22 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay.

23 MS. COVINGTON: But I had to call Laclede to
24 confirm what I read in the paper as opposed to the card
25 that came in the mail.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: I appreciate you bringing
2 this to our attention, because this is the first I had
3 heard about it.

4 MS. COVINGTON: Well, Mr. Tomich knows that
5 he did -- he sent me an e-mail thanking me for bringing
6 it to his attention and that he would put a correction
7 in the paper, but I didn't check to see if he did.

8 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Well, we'll make sure
9 that the building people are aware because people
10 probably won't see the correction.

11 MS. COVINGTON: Right. They may not even
12 have kept their notice because of what they read in the
13 paper. A lot of people just believe everything they
14 read in the paper and don't follow up.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: I appreciate that.

16 MS. COVINGTON: Okay.

17 JUDGE DIPPELL: We do have -- if you know of
18 anybody who thought it was going to be on that date, we
19 do still have a few hearings in the St. Louis area.
20 We're going to have one Tuesday night at the University
21 of Missouri, St. Louis. We're having one next Wednesday
22 night out in Clayton. And in July, we're going to be
23 scheduling another hearing out in St. Charles.

24 Thank you, ma'am. Bernice Coleman? I have
25 two Bernices in a row.

1 BERNICE COLEMAN,
2 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
3 as follows:

4 MS. COLEMAN: My name is Bernice Coleman,
5 B-E-R-N-I-C-E C-O-L-E-M-A-N.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Go ahead with your comments.

7 MS. COLEMAN: First of all, I know don't any
8 of you care. That's just as plain as --

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: I don't think the audience
10 can hear you.

11 MS. COLEMAN: I know don't any of the
12 commission or nobody from Laclede Gas care about the
13 elderly and the low-income. That's just plain to see.
14 So just admit you don't care.

15 In my house, I have to wear a hat, a coat,
16 and boots all the winter. And I've tried not to turn my
17 gas on until it's at least about 50 degrees in my house.
18 And still, I end up with a \$500 gas bill.

19 And I would like to ask this question to
20 Laclede Gas. The way things are going, I will not be
21 able to have gas all year. So will they be kind enough
22 to -- when they cut the gas off, after the heating
23 season, will they be kind enough to not charge me to get
24 it turned on for the winter? Will they at least do that
25 for the senior citizens or low-incomes. Because bottom

1 line is everybody can see that they don't care.

2 And that budget billing, that don't help
3 your bills at all. And they put me on the budget and I
4 didn't know I was on the budget. I went down to see
5 about my bill and she said the budget. I said I didn't
6 know I was on the budget. So I advised them that I
7 would not consider going on the budget. They can do it
8 if they want to, but it's going to hit the garbage can.

9 And I don't think any of you-all would want
10 to spend the summer months without hot water where you
11 can't take a shower or wash your dishes, clean your
12 house. But that's what I am forced -- I am forced to do
13 that because I cannot afford to pay to use gas the whole
14 summer, the winter and summer. I am a low-income. My
15 money is -- is less than \$700 a month. I cannot afford
16 it. And I know any of you don't care.

17 But when Laclede -- at least not charge me
18 to cut it off and turn it back on. It's already off.
19 So who do I see about that?

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: Mr. Pendergast, I'm going to
21 direct you to the lady back here.

22 Are there any questions before Ms. Coleman
23 leaves?

24 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions.

25 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I have no questions.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Coleman, for
2 your comments.

3 Okay. Bernice Hardin? I'm sorry. Along
4 with Ms. Covington, there was another name on the line,
5 Yvonne Foendor, I think that's the last name. She's not
6 here? Ollie Hollman?

7 OLLIE HOLLMAN,
8 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
9 as follows:

10 JUDGE DIPPELL: If you could spell your name
11 and then give us your comments.

12 MS. HOLLMAN: My first name is O-L-L-I-E,
13 Hollman, H-O-L-L-M-A-N.

14 You are the Missouri Commission. Okay. I
15 filed a complaint with the Missouri Commission. I
16 really feel that Laclede Gas does not deserve an
17 increase because I feel like I have been harassed by
18 Laclede Gas for services that I haven't used and I have
19 two houses in my name with Laclede Gas Company. One
20 house doesn't have any gas on at all. And I have a \$255
21 bill.

22 And this harassment has been going on with
23 me for the last four or five years. The last complaint
24 that I sent in to the Missouri Commission conveniently
25 got lost. So that was in January. So since I have not

1 been able to get any help from the Commission for my
2 concerns with Laclede Gas, they have just continued to
3 harass me and charge me for gas I am not using. And I
4 don't think that I'm the only one that they are doing
5 this to.

6 And I have proof right here with me of what
7 they have done to me. My last bill for this Veronica
8 address, I have three different amounts. For a
9 particular day, I only had gas on one day when I put in
10 a new furnace. And from that, I have a \$255 bill.

11 Now, I just received a bill today from
12 Laclede Gas, which they tried to make me an adjustment
13 because I did go to Channel 2 to talk this over with
14 somebody because I felt like it was a -- it's not just
15 me, but I feel like this is with everyone, especially
16 with the devices that they have on the gas meters there.

17 These devices, as I told Laclede Gas, as
18 they revolution around, my one home, there's a meter
19 that goes around that's on the lower left-hand side. It
20 jumps almost half-way around the meter, which to my
21 understanding, as it makes these revolutions, makes your
22 gas bill go up. It calculates -- makes the rest of the
23 meters move.

24 So when I called Laclede Gas and asked about
25 this, they would not send anybody out to fix it or to

1 see about it, up until recently this last week when I
2 had got in touch with somebody from Channel 2.

3 I don't think everybody's bills are as high
4 as they are for real and I don't think the devices are
5 really adding up the correct gas usage that we are
6 using, because I don't believe I have used as much gas
7 as it is. I don't have a kitchen and heat the house.

8 The one that -- the one that the meter is
9 jumping around, they said that they're going to send
10 somebody out, which was just this past week. I think
11 these hearings probably had a little bit to do with
12 that.

13 But if I'm not using anything, then I don't
14 have anything on, but a water heater, I don't think I
15 should be getting \$100 gas bill because it's a new water
16 heater, it's not old and there is no cooking. I don't
17 have any children there anymore. So there is no reason
18 for me to keep having these kind of gas bills.

19 At one time, people were saying you're using
20 that much. Well, when I had three children at home, I
21 thought maybe, yeah, there's water, we're using water.
22 Everybody's taking baths every day, cooking every day,
23 but now it's only me. And I'm still having these high
24 gas bills.

25 When I called the utility commission, which

1 is who we are supposed to complain to, and when they
2 tell me they can't find a record of my complaint, when I
3 sent it certified mail, receipt return requested, I
4 received it back and I have a copy of that also. And
5 they're telling me they don't have it. My complaint is
6 explaining thoroughly how high these bills are.

7 I had a period in my life where I paid like
8 one month for maybe five or six months. It ended up to
9 seven or eight hundred dollars and I was only credited
10 the 299.

11 Now, I know that if everybody did what I did
12 and took the time to go and send cards in or sit down
13 and really go through your bills the way you're supposed
14 to, they would probably find that they're being
15 overcharged also.

16 No, I don't think Laclede Gas needs an
17 increase. I think they need to treat people fairly and
18 really charge them according to the way they are using
19 and not what they want them to pay.

20 (Applause.)

21 Because I feel like I'm paying more because
22 -- in retaliation for making a complaint with the
23 commission. So if we complain on paper to the
24 commission, then we're penalized by Laclede Gas Company.
25 And I think that's unfair. So who do we complain to?

1 If I write a letter to the commission and they tell me
2 that they can't find my complaint. Now, then, who do I
3 go to next?

4 Well, I took it for so long until I went to
5 Channel 2. Well, maybe Channel 2 is not big enough.
6 Because I don't feel enough people here. And I know
7 there's more people here that are having the same
8 problem that I'm having. So I will say that they're
9 going to keep being charged higher bills because Laclede
10 Gas can beat us. They got more money. They got
11 lawyers. And we, the people, don't have it, so we have
12 to pay it or we have to get it cut off.

13 Well, one of my houses that had my name on
14 it, yes they did cut it off. They were sending me
15 estimated bills and never corrected any estimated
16 charges on any bills that I had. But you still charged
17 me and then you tell me if I don't pay these designated
18 charges, you're going to cut my service off. They cut
19 my service off after they I had several attempts of
20 calling, by coming by my house unannounced, thinking
21 that I was stealing gas.

22 Well, I was accused of stealing gas because
23 I wasn't using much. Well, it seemed to me that since
24 my gas bill was low, they didn't want to credit me for
25 having a low bill. You either have a bill or you

1 estimate it or you do something to make these bills
2 like, you know, you're going to cut it off. Well, this
3 particular time, they did come and cut it off, even
4 though I had been paying on the bill.

5 But they were harassing me so bad that when
6 they come in that particular day, he told me if I didn't
7 pay that amount of money that day, they was going to cut
8 it off, so I told him to cut if off. It can stay off
9 all winter. When I decided I wasn't going to have it
10 turned on because I had my name on another house, they
11 took that bill and put that amount onto my other bill.
12 But now, these are estimated charges that I'm paying on.
13 And every time I try to call and say something about it,
14 I have a problem and I really don't think it's just me.

15 But you keep calling and saying something
16 about it, you're still going to have to pay that bill.
17 There's adjustment to too many things that's being done.
18 Now, I do have -- everything I have, I have -- I have a
19 letter of what I sent to the utility commission and they
20 just told me an answer yesterday. That they didn't have
21 a copy of my complaint. And like I said that was back
22 in January that I complained because I'm just tired of
23 being harassed from Laclede Gas.

24 So why would they need an increase? If
25 they're taking all our money more than they need anyway.

1 They don't need an increase for that. They're getting
2 what they want from me whether we use it or not. So if
3 everybody would just sit down and -- they send this book
4 out and this says, well, this is how you read this bill.
5 Well, if you read this bill, there's more to reading
6 this meter than what's in this book, because when I
7 tried to find out before, how can I read my own meter,
8 then they told me, well, they have to call the weather
9 company or something to find out how -- how it's
10 registered or how something else is registered. What's
11 in here is just showing what you see on your bill. But
12 there are some other evaluations as to how you get
13 deceived.

14 So this book is not complete where somebody
15 could really just sit down and walk through -- go
16 through their -- read their own meter and add their own
17 thing up. You're not showing where you get -- after you
18 get this bill how you are calculating it. And we're
19 supposed to be able to look on our -- go in our house
20 and go over and read -- and show what we're using to add
21 it up.

22 So there's only so much that we can do, then
23 it's unknown for somebody like me that wants to keep up
24 with it, if everybody did it. And a lot of these older
25 women in here, they're not going to do that. I don't

1 know how they are at reading or if they understand these
2 books that you put out or what. But this is not showing
3 how to calculate if somebody really set down to their
4 bill. Somebody that really wants to figure out their
5 gas bill, this is not enough.

6 Okay. So if you can't do that, how can you
7 keep up with it? So then you have to go by what the gas
8 company says or they'll turn it off. Well, yeah, they
9 did mine. They cut it off, even though I was keeping up
10 and even though I'm trying to conserve.

11 My furnace had a problem and I had turned my
12 gas off in the basement because I didn't want the gas
13 seeping anywhere, which is -- I think that's why they
14 thought that I was stealing gas because it wasn't
15 registering anywhere so -- and that one time I had asked
16 the gas company, well, am I allowed to turn my gas off
17 from the basement if I choose to.

18 So I'm being harassed for turning my gas off
19 and this is at a house that nobody's living in. Is it
20 against the law for me to do that? Because they stormed
21 into my house like I had broke the law and when they
22 came in there, they found that everything was turned
23 off. I had just shut it off because I had a problem
24 with the furnace and I didn't want it on. So if it's
25 against the law, then I would like somebody to let me

1 know that because I feel like I can walk down in my
2 basement and shut my gas off if that's what I choose to
3 do, without being harassed about it.

4 I think if more people would show up, if
5 they felt like they were going to be harassed by the gas
6 company -- but after having two houses with my name on
7 them, then -- I'm tired of the harassment, because I've
8 taken it for a lot of years. No more -- the more I
9 mention it -- I understand that the increases are
10 different, but when you know you are being harassed and
11 you can show that you're being harassed, then what do I
12 do? I mean, can you-all recommend, you're the
13 commission, who isn't here to help me, so I felt like I
14 needed to come to one of these hearings where there's
15 somebody else.

16 And I know that it's just not always Laclede
17 Gas itself. It's the people who work for Laclede Gas
18 and it's their -- their employees that get attitudes
19 because they -- maybe they don't want to work that day
20 or maybe they don't want to hear your complaint that day
21 and they're, you know, mad at you because you're mad
22 because you got a high bill. So then you got a nasty
23 attitude because Laclede Gas' employees are mad at you.

24 So I don't know what you-all are doing,
25 you-all are putting on that this is a nuisance customer

1 or what. There has to be something that you put on that
2 makes them see that, well, this is -- we got it on them.
3 So you know, when we got it on them, then your bill is
4 going to go up. So you know, it does happen. I'm
5 telling you, it happens like that. You can be a
6 nuisance to them and then they're going to raise your
7 gas bill.

8 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I have a suggestion
9 to make --

10 MS. HOLLMAN: Yeah, you don't want to hear
11 me anymore about this --

12 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No, no, no. I want
13 to hear you, but you could filibuster all the night.

14 MS. HOLLMAN: No. But I'm trying to get --
15 but -- but I'm feeling like I have a legitimate
16 complaint. And I have written the utility commission
17 because I haven't gotten the help I wanted and I want
18 somebody else to see the complaint that I did. And I
19 want it to be -- and I want it to be addressed.

20 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I want to have
21 somebody to help you if you will just pipe down just for
22 a minute and someone will help you.

23 MS. HOLLMAN: Okay.

24 COMMISSIONER APPLING: We're going to
25 address --

1 MS. HOLLMAN: Okay. And I want to see that
2 it -- that the help gets to me.

3 COMMISSIONER APPLING: We're going to make
4 sure --

5 MS. HOLLMAN: Okay. Because I am tired of
6 being harassed.

7 COMMISSIONER APPLING: There are other
8 people tonight that would like to testify too so --

9 MS. HOLLMAN: And I want some help. And I
10 am tired of being harassed by Laclede Gas Company and no
11 matter how high my bill gets, I can never get it down.
12 Because the more I complain, the more I'm harassed. And
13 when I'm harassed for a house that there's no gas hooked
14 to -- there's nothing on. Nothing. And I have a \$250
15 bill. There is no way you can justify that to me. No
16 way. And I think that that's going along with everyone.

17 And then somebody like me sees that you-all
18 want an increase, well, we're getting smart. That's not
19 right. I don't think you deserve an increase on any gas
20 to anybody's house. Because you treat people like I
21 have been treated.

22 JUDGE DIPPELL: Ms. Hollman? Ms. Hollman?
23 Ms. Hollman?

24 MS. HOLLMAN: Yes.

25 JUDGE DIPPELL: This is Ms. Gray and she's

1 the supervisor in charge of our consumer division and
2 I'm going to ask her if she will please take a look at
3 your complaint information and I'm going to ask
4 Mr. Franson, who is the staff attorney if he will make
5 sure that you-all follow up on this and find out what
6 happened to Ms. Hollman's complaint and report back to
7 the commission as to what happened, because we don't
8 want complaints to get lost.

9 Also, if somebody would help Ms. Hollman
10 with the meter reading issue, so that she can understand
11 how that -- how that happens.

12 MR. PENDERGAST: Judge, do you want that in
13 the case or how do you want that recorded?

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Just go ahead and file a
15 memorandum in the case following Ms. Hollman's
16 complaint.

17 Esther Irving? Fred Miller? Would you
18 please raise your right hand.

19 MR. MILLER: I have no objections to raising
20 my right hand, but for my own curiosity, why am I being
21 sworn in? I've never been told that I have to be sworn
22 in to -- for a disagreement of anything.

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Well, we like to be able to
24 rely on your comments, as the Public Counsel, we want to
25 rely on them as evidence in the case. If you're sworn

1 in, we have the opportunity to do that, as well as it
2 makes the proceeding more serious. People --

3 MR. MILLER: I don't think the proceeding
4 could get any more serious than what has been said here
5 today. How can it get more serious?

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Sir, if you don't want to
7 swear or affirm, that's fine. It just means your
8 comments may not be able to entered into evidence at a
9 later date.

10 MR. MILLER: Well, I don't have any problem
11 with that.

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: I would appreciate it if you
13 would give us your name and spell it for the court
14 reporter so she can get it accurate.

15 MR. MILLER: I am called Fred Miller,
16 Junior. F-R-E-D M-I-L-L-E-R, Junior.

17 For my own personal gas bill uses, it was
18 double, almost double in half. The highest gas bill
19 that I had ever received was about \$79. After the gas
20 rate went up, it went up to 189. Now, no one has been
21 able to fully explain to me how Laclede Gas was able to
22 send out estimate gas bills. For over two years, I've
23 received estimate gas bills. Whenever I tried to
24 inquire as to this estimated gas bill, I was -- had to
25 speak to a machine. I was put on hold. I had to wait

1 sometimes as long as a half an hour before I was able to
2 get anyone.

3 Now, the young lady here posed the questions
4 to Ms. Jenkins as to what she felt that the -- Laclede
5 Gas should do to help the poor or the -- those on low
6 income. Well, all these customer's gas bills, they were
7 probably far more than the gas bills read as the gas
8 bills. What happened to those moneys?

9 Fixed income. A great many -- the majority
10 of the elderly, myself included, are on fixed income.
11 It has been brought to my attention that the government
12 intends to tax Social Security. That is another
13 reduction in our income.

14 Now, here is a company that Laclede Gas --
15 the City always makes amendments. Why are they allowed
16 to make amendment and still want a gas rate increase?

17 But what's most -- annoying is really not
18 the right word that I want to use right now. Laclede
19 Gas already knows everything that's been discussed here
20 in this meeting. Some feel like it is -- like it
21 insults my intelligence if he wants to meet and discuss
22 the gas rate increase. I know that they are all aware
23 of what's going on. I know that Laclede Gas -- they
24 watch, they observe, they watch to see how we react and
25 respond to the increases.

1 As the speakers spoke earlier, I am really
2 embarrassed about the turnout for this hearing today in
3 regards to this increase.

4 Actually, we're not speaking of \$6.50 a
5 month. I see here something that says 43 million. And
6 this is eight million. So trying to make us believe
7 that this -- that these moneys are going to be used for
8 this purpose, I think that's an insult to us also.

9 But like Ms. Hoffman said, we ask them about
10 the bill and we have no control over what Laclede Gas
11 do. They try to make you believe that the CEOs, who I
12 know are major shareholders, everybody knows they are
13 not interested in the low-income. They're only
14 interested in the bottom line. You know that and I know
15 that.

16 Now, I don't really expect you and I know
17 you're here, but I don't believe you can really make a
18 difference. You're not politicians. You're not
19 experienced with lobbying. These are the ones who say
20 so.

21 Lobbying is another word for bribery. It's
22 worded different. The word politician is used to make
23 it legal. Lobbying. That's all it is for me and any
24 intelligent individual, I believe.

25 I realize that many of you will say --

1 basically what you will tell us -- what you will say to
2 us, you went to school, you have great intellect. But
3 that doesn't mean the politicians will stop Laclede Gas
4 CEO from raising gas rate prices. This puts it to
5 almost \$43 million. Is that for this year? Last year?
6 Is there going to be another gas rate hike that the
7 politicians are going to give to Laclede Gas? I know
8 they'll help the lobbying and you do too. You do too.
9 And you and I know that that's where the buck stops.
10 With the lobbying.

11 And we as individuals, we cannot compete.
12 So now, we are left with a recourse. We can write
13 letters, go to this individual, go to that individual.
14 We do not have the final say.

15 That's all I have to say to you, but I do
16 wish that there were more citizens than has shown up
17 today and I could give them directions on which way they
18 should go. But coming here is not the direction. It is
19 a pathway, but it is not a direction.

20 You need to get yourselves better collected,
21 you get together and you make tools, you go here, you go
22 there, for your pleasure. You need to get you a tool
23 together and go to Jefferson City. You do not have the
24 moneys, you have your hearts. It seems like you have
25 that. We, the people. I thank you for your time.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

2 Commissioner Murray, any questions?

3 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

5 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Any questions from the
7 attorneys?

8 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, sir.

10 MR. MILLER: Thank you.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Felix Leroy McDonald?

12 FELIX McDONALD,

13 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
14 as follows:

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: If you could spell your name
16 and then give us your comments.

17 MR. McDONALD: My name is

18 Felix Leroy McDonald, F-E-L-I-X, L-E-R-O-Y,

19 M-C-D-O-N-A-L-D. At the present, I'm living at 1362

20 Semple.

21 The problem I have is I've been living in
22 St. Louis a few years now. We have heating bills, they
23 have such kind hearts, they came in and shut it down and
24 told the people that had paid it that they hadn't paid a
25 damn thing. That's what he did. He lied and they sent

1 us a bill and I told him I'm not paying for that.

2 So this is what's on my mind. See, Laclede
3 Gas Company, they got a bunch of buzzards in there.
4 They don't care nothing about regular people, like the
5 people here. They think we're just a bunch of poor
6 folks and they don't give a rat's butt for us.

7 And another problem I have, you got your
8 poor folks and I'm talking I'm poor, but we're talking
9 about being concerned about the people. Because you've
10 just shoved it down our throat and saying suck on it and
11 the hell with you. And that's the way it is to me. I
12 don't usually talk like this, but this is -- this is the
13 way -- this is the way you treat the people.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Is that all of your
15 comments?

16 MR. McDONALD: No, it's not. You don't give
17 any consideration. You just sit down reading off the
18 list. See this don't make sense, you know that. The
19 way you treat us. You tell us you need a rate hike.
20 You need to start snatching some of that money out of
21 your stockholder's pocket. They won't miss it. They
22 can't even count their money.

23 Like me, I'm on a fixed income. I only get
24 so much a month.

25 Another problem I have, you figure you can

1 do anything you want, you tell them to go to hell. If
2 anybody here thinks that I'm telling a lie, I want to
3 see the hands from anybody that thinks I'm wrong.

4 Apparently, I don't see any hands.

5 That's all I have to say. Because I don't
6 think you need a rate hike. You need a rate rollback.
7 Because when they get a hike, we're the ones that suffer
8 first. They ain't going to stop -- they're not going to
9 stop turning off those -- the services during the
10 winter. They don't give a damn about nobody freezing.

11 That's your problem. Let's be truthful.
12 Let's not talk from both sides of our mouths. You-all
13 don't really give a damn about the people, do you?
14 We're paying ourselves -- oh, hell, they're just a bunch
15 of broke-ass folks. That's the way you-all think about
16 us. I'm just letting you know how I feel.

17 I don't think you need -- I don't think you
18 deserve anything. Sorry, brother, you need to go out of
19 business.

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Mr. McDonald. Do
21 you have any questions from Mr. McDonald?

22 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.

24 Ann Gatling?

25 ANN GATLING,

1 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
2 as follows:

3 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
4 spell your name and give us your comments.

5 MS. GATLING: My name is A-N-N, last name is
6 Gatling, G-A-T-L-I-N-G.

7 I've come here tonight to bring to your
8 attention what's happening. I don't know -- I'm sure
9 I'm not the only one with this problem. About a month
10 ago, Laclede Gas came out to our building and it's a
11 four family flat and they turned off all the gas in the
12 whole building. Now, I was at home that day. I didn't
13 know they had turned my gas off. I'm not behind on my
14 bills. I never have been. I was fortunate enough to
15 have a decent job. I used to work for Famous Barr
16 Company, which is now Macy's, but they laid me off in
17 February, three weeks before I was able to retire. So
18 I'm not getting this money anymore.

19 So soon, it's going to be a problem for me
20 to pay my gas bill. And I'm sure that they're not going
21 to take into consideration that I've always paid my
22 bill, whenever they said pay it, I paid it.

23 Now, a month ago, when they turned the gas
24 off to the building, they did not knock on my door, they
25 left me no notice, they said nothing about turning the

1 gas off to the building. And I had to call the
2 emergency people and they came out at 12:30 that night,
3 which is the next morning and they turned the gas back
4 on for my apartment and came back up and lit my furnace.

5 Now, the thing that I'm a little upset about
6 is I have to pay to reheat this whole tank of water
7 which would have already been heated if they hadn't
8 turned it off. Now, I feel like I'm not the only one
9 being punished. This is like a punishment to me that I
10 have to reheat all this water which is going to take
11 more gas. Money is tight for a lot of people. Like
12 it's tight for me right now because I don't have a job.

13 And I think it's wrong for Laclede Gas to
14 make me pay to reheat all this water by their mistake or
15 their error. Something that they should have done, that
16 they didn't do. They left me no notice, they did not
17 knock on my door, they didn't say anything.

18 I found out my neighbor next door in this
19 four family flat, they wanted to turn her water (sic)
20 off. So how come I got punished for it? These people
21 don't need no more money. They're getting money for
22 stuff that they don't really deserve, because my water
23 would have been heated and you know, it kicks on and
24 off, you know, to keep up that certain temperature. I
25 had to reheat that whole tank. It may be two dollars to

1 you, but that's a lot of money to me.

2 And I think that they shouldn't get no rate
3 increase because they're cheating people. This is
4 cheating. This is wrong. So please take into
5 consideration and not give these people a rate hike,
6 because they'll cheat anyway that they can to get money
7 out of poor people.

8 And that's all I have to say. Thank you.

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Gatling. Do
10 you know how -- how the meters in the building -- are
11 there four separate meters in the building?

12 MS. GATLING: Yes, it is.

13 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. And did all of the
14 gas in the building get turned off?

15 MS. GATLING: Yes. It's only two families
16 in the building right now, me and another couple or
17 whoever is living over there. But they wanted to cut
18 her gas off. They cut mine off too. And now, I'm out
19 of two dollars that I can't afford because my money is
20 really tight now. Because like I said, I don't have a
21 job anymore so when I asked Laclede Gas -- I called them
22 and I said, well, should I get a credit or something for
23 reheating this whole tank of water because I shouldn't
24 have to. They said, no, you just have to pay it. I
25 said, but that's not fair. I'm a good customer. I'm

1 never late. Whatever you say to pay, I pay it. So why
2 am I being punished?

3 So I think it's wrong. They don't need the
4 money. Please don't give them no rate hike. Thank you.

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you.
6 Commissioner Murray?

7 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Just one question. Do
8 you pay your gas bill directly to Laclede or to your
9 landlord?

10 MS. GATLING: I pay it directly to Laclede
11 Gas.

12 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Okay. Thank you.

13 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

14 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Attorneys?

16 MR. PENDERGAST: Ma'am?

17 MS. GATLING: Yes?

18 MR. PENDERGAST: I just want -- I don't have
19 any questions. I just want to tell you that if you had
20 disconnect service when you shouldn't have, I want to
21 personally apologize for that happening to you. I want
22 to make it right and if we made a mistake, I want to go
23 ahead and fix it. So talk to me as soon as this is
24 over. I'd like to see if I can fix it, okay?

25 MS. GATLING: Yes, sir.

1 MR. PENDERGAST: Thank you.

2 MS. GATLING: You're welcome.

3 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Mr. Pendergast.
4 Thank you, ma'am. Frank Weeder?

5 FRANK WEEDER.

6 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
7 as follows:

8 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you. If you could
9 spell your name for the court reporter.

10 MR. WEEDER: F-R-A-N-K W-E-E-D-E-R. I live
11 at 4621 Pope.

12 You're talking about gas company changes. I
13 have a problem -- well, the first problem I have, we got
14 a \$400 gas bill. The major mistake is that I changed
15 ZIP code, changed my ZIP. Now, they're saying --
16 they're charging me what the people paid before me.
17 It's 400. I stayed in the county for the last seven
18 years. So we -- oh, in the city, the houses aren't
19 built well, you know.

20 But what I did, I covered everything, I
21 covered everything up. And I went to one room. They
22 came by and they checked my gas, they cut my furnace off
23 on me. Just cold water. I don't have any hot water. I
24 didn't have no water in March. I still have a bill on
25 that for \$900.

1 All I want to say is I don't want them to
2 cut my gas off because like I told them -- I told them I
3 would pay \$100 on the first and some on the 15th, you
4 know, because I've got cold water.

5 So I mean, you know, I just want to know
6 when they cut my gas -- I still got a bill from them --
7 I mean, the gas is still on, I just got hot water, I
8 don't have no -- I don't use the -- I don't use it for
9 cooking. I don't use it for cooking. I use electric
10 for cooking.

11 I asked them -- I've just got a little space
12 heater and I use Union Electric -- I couldn't afford the
13 -- couldn't afford the gas bill. I'm on Social
14 Security. I don't want to be claimed on the fixed
15 income. I want to get off of it, you know, because I
16 owe too much. I just have to get me another job to pay
17 it off.

18 That's it. I don't think they should get a
19 raise because, I mean, I owe it and I'll pay it. That's
20 all I want to say.

21 Wait -- ever since March, I've been living
22 in one room, I haven't even been using the space heater.
23 I'm in an older house.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, sir.
25 Commissioner Murray, have you any questions?

1 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions.

2 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

3 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you for your comments.

5 Anything from the attorneys?

6 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Let's see. That's

8 all of the names that I have on here. I have

9 Ms. Covington written down again. Is there anyone else

10 who wanted to testify? Okay. Oh, there's another

11 sheet. I hadn't received that yet.

12 Donald Manning?

13 MR. ROBINSON: Eddie Robinson.

14 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Robinson?

15 MR. ROBINSON: Yes.

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay.

17 EDDIE ROBINSON,

18 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies

19 as follows:

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: If you could spell your name

21 and then give us your comments.

22 MR. ROBINSON: E-D-D-I-E R-O-B-I-N-S-O-N.

23 My problem is that I keep getting an

24 estimated bill and they tell me that the satellite in

25 the sky is on the pole or whatever and the meters in the

1 basement. Someone is at my house all day, 24/7 and I
2 live in a four family flat. And so there is no reason
3 for the meter reader not to come by and access the
4 basement to read the meter.

5 So the reason why I'm here, as of February,
6 the last two weeks of February, my furnace has been off
7 and never had it on. It hasn't been on since then. And
8 I got a Laclede bill for \$300 and the state paid \$174.
9 That's \$126 not paid by the state. What is happening is
10 I made a call and they said the state would pay the
11 delayed payment. Then I called again and they said that
12 my bill was zero balance. And the month of May, this
13 month, was supposed to be paid June the 4th of this
14 month -- June 4th, \$130 which -- they gave me an
15 estimated bill. My bill was 85 -- 84.70. So when I
16 went to Laclede Gas, my bill was 85.70.

17 So when I went down on May 16th, it was a
18 total of 85.22, which was different, the balance. They
19 expect me to pay what I can, because I pay what I can,
20 this is what's going to happen. They're going to make
21 me delinquent. I'm not going to pay for the delinquent,
22 nothing delinquent when they made the mistake. You
23 understand what I'm saying? The mistake was made by
24 Laclede Gas. Why do I have to pay for their mistake?
25 They give me a state bill.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: I'm going to ask if someone
2 from Laclede can talk with him about the meter reading
3 and the -- and if that doesn't help you out, then I want
4 you to be sure and talk to one of our staff members and
5 see if they can help get it all straightened out.

6 MR. ROBINSON: Thank you.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Murray, did you
8 have any questions?

9 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions.

10 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

11 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

12 JUDGE DIPPELL: Anything else from the
13 attorneys?

14 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you sir. Is there a
16 Donald Manning?

17 DONALD MANNING,
18 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
19 as follows:

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: If you would please spell
21 your name and then give us your comments.

22 MR. MANNING: D-O-N-A-L-D M-A-N-N-I-N-G.

23 The only thing that I really have to say is
24 that I have been in my apartment for one year. And the
25 only time a meter reader came to my house -- and I'm

1 retired -- the only time the meter reader came to my
2 house is that one time. All the rest of my bills I have
3 been getting estimated and I feel as though it's wrong.
4 Because I'm there 24/7. Now, why does one meter reader
5 come in one year? That's what I want to know.

6 JUDGE DIPPELL: Sir, is your meter indoors
7 or outdoors?

8 MR. MANNING: My meter is in my basement.

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Murray, do you
10 have any questions?

11 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: There are company
12 representatives here that you can talk to who could
13 explain to you about their automated meter reading
14 system and I think that would help for you to understand
15 your questions.

16 MR. MANNING: Young lady, young lady, I
17 can't understand if the meter is outside, the meter can
18 be read every month.

19 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Well that's why --

20 MR. MANNING: Look.

21 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: You need to talk to
22 the company and find out how they're reading the meters
23 that are indoors. I think they can explain that, sir,
24 so that you can understand what's going on. And if not,
25 like the judge said, talk to one of the members of the

1 staff of the commission that's here.

2 MR. MANNING: You-all have a blessed day.

3 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Thank you.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: Did you have anything

5 Commissioner Appling?

6 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Anything from the attorneys?

8 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

9 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, sir, for your
10 comments. Ruth Williams? I know it's getting late and
11 I appreciate everyone's patience. We're try to get
12 through everyone.

13 RUTH WILLIAMS,
14 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
15 as follows:

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you spell your name?

17 MS. WILLIAMS: My name is Ruth, R-U-T-H
18 W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S.

19 I live in Dutchtown on the south side. I
20 live at 4433 Virginia. Now, the problem that I have, we
21 have dry heat and the problem I have with my bill is
22 that I'm living on a fixed income. I receive food
23 stamps so that helps with part of my bill. And for the
24 last two or three months, they have had a meeting with
25 Laclede Gas Company and HDC have communicated with them

1 and they have put me on a budget and I have paid that
2 for the last two or three months.

3 I don't believe you need an increase. Times
4 are hard. And it seems like I can't get anywhere. I
5 don't think you need an increase.

6 That's all I have to say.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, Ms. Williams.
8 Commissioner Murray, any questions?

9 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions, thank
10 you.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

12 COMMISSIONER APPLING: I have no questions,
13 but thank you very much for coming in and being very
14 patient with the hearing. Thank you very much.

15 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

16 JUDGE DIPPELL: Do we have any questions
17 from the attorneys?

18 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Rose Palmer?

20 ROSE PALMER,
21 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
22 as follows:

23 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you spell your name
24 for the court reporter?

25 MS. PALMER: I'm Rose, R-O-S-E, Palmer,

1 P-A-L-M-E-R.

2 Okay. I'm going to take a different
3 approach. First of all, the approach of this hearing
4 was to get some comments from the customers regarding
5 rate increase. I think Laclede Gas does need to do a
6 rate change, but an increase is not even consistent to
7 the market. I represent -- I'm a product of corporate
8 America, one of the utility companies. And I've been
9 involved in community affairs as long as I have lived in
10 the city for the last 25 to 30 years.

11 And on March 27th, the neighborhood
12 organization, we invited utility companies to a meeting
13 and Laclede Gas came out. And once I think complaints
14 or issues are addressed, then the appropriate Laclede
15 Gas representatives are able to resolve those
16 situational concerns. Our objective of the meeting was
17 to let the utility companies know -- I don't think the
18 companies are sensitive to the market.

19 Now, I have no -- business is business. And
20 that's the, you know, the premise that most companies
21 operate on. But there's no sensitivity to our main
22 concern to the customers. The customers service in your
23 front office is very poor.

24 And instead of a rate increase, Laclede Gas
25 needs to do customer service training. There is, I

1 understand, a script that the representatives have,
2 because I work for a similar company. They have no
3 listening skills to what the clients are talking about.
4 There is no customer service like there has been in the
5 past regarding checking furnaces before they're turned
6 on to make sure there will not be an outage in inclement
7 weather, you know, when it gets cold.

8 I mean, that could be something that Laclede
9 Gas can work with the community on. And like I said, it
10 is community -- our suggestion was that we should have
11 more community meetings so you can hear the response of
12 your customer -- this could help the companies
13 understand what business practice they need to focus on.

14 I represent the baby boomers. That is a
15 growing population in the world. We are the oldest
16 living people, not just in America, but in the world.
17 If Laclede Gas is doing business like other companies in
18 America, we're all being affected by the market trends.

19 Job exploitation, I am the product of
20 downsizing and just like where three years ago, I could
21 have afforded possibly a gas bill, but not at this rate,
22 I cannot do that now. Not only am I a product of
23 downsizing and a product of your increasing population,
24 elderly, older population, I am also affected by the
25 disability.

1 Okay. We talked about why you-all don't get
2 the support or response of people. People don't -- they
3 suppress their anger because they feel you are a
4 monopoly. You pretty much are the only game in town,
5 quote, unquote. People don't have choices. So they
6 figure you're going to do what you need to do. And this
7 is why, like one of the speakers said, she's going to be
8 penalized for speaking her opinion and making her --
9 putting in a complaint. And that's unfortunate because
10 I think you could learn something here.

11 You know, when you hear the outcry of your
12 customer and you don't respond to it. And I understand
13 you're just the front office, because the CEOs, the
14 board meetings, they respond to the bottom line and the
15 bottom line is that people are no longer in positions to
16 afford the increase of the cost of living. And Laclede
17 Gas is the highest utility bill that serves the Missouri
18 area.

19 So in addition to saying there should be no
20 rate increase, but a rate change. There should be a
21 change in the way Laclede Gas does business. Laclede
22 Gas -- I think Laclede Gas should offer some of their
23 customers nine plus efficiency gas furnace or boilers,
24 whatever they're using. This is something that I think
25 Laclede Gas can incorporate in a budget.

1 I think Laclede Gas should give people
2 incentives for prompt payments, such as credit on their
3 bill. I think customer service, such as free service to
4 check customer's heating facilities before they're
5 turned on, to avoid a great outage should be done free
6 of charge. I think that's a customer service that
7 should be considered.

8 I think the cost of gas for you, for Laclede
9 Gas, I understand it's passed on to the customer, but
10 maybe Laclede Gas needs to research alternatives for
11 business for heat. I think since there are no
12 comparisons to go and get heating service, other than
13 electric company, then it's very difficult for people to
14 feel they have an opportunity to speak with you with a
15 listening ear.

16 Also, I think that if you maintain some
17 roots with the customers and customers that can't afford
18 your rate increase, they probably don't even pay the gas
19 bills or somewhere in warmer client -- move where
20 there's a warmer client.

21 So that's a very -- it's very unfair. And I
22 think the Public Service Commission did not represent
23 the public fairly, because we should come -- we should
24 have come here with some statistics on the -- the
25 progress that the gas company already received and that

1 should have been provided to the attendees here at this
2 meeting.

3 I think also that in addition to doing that,
4 that could justify giving these people some specifics
5 and some facts to work from, if the Public Service
6 Commission's going to be a neutral party. It would be
7 very business professional, intelligent, to say here's
8 some facts and let's -- it's really not a place to
9 complain about the gas bills, it's to help us and you
10 decide and even Laclede Gas to decide -- the decision
11 making for Laclede Gas.

12 Well, let's not consider a rate increase.
13 What about maintaining the rate? Well, what about
14 supporting those persons that cannot afford gas and then
15 remove them as a customer. Because I was always
16 educated that this is pretty much maintained by supply
17 and demand. And this is your customers who have the
18 demand and I don't think they give the proper business
19 or customer service.

20 So as to why I make my speech, I think a
21 rate increase is insensitive. I think it's unfair. I
22 think it's poor service in equities in the way you bill
23 customers, based on the certain lack of patience. And I
24 think those are some statistics that could have been
25 done -- could have been provided here. I think some

1 research should have been -- can be done in the future.

2 So Laclede Gas, if they're going to be a
3 provider of this service, then they need to also
4 understand that this product should be affordable, as
5 well as being a quality product.

6 Thank you for your attention.

7 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you very much for your
8 suggestions. Commissioner Murray?

9 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions. Thank
10 you.

11 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

12 COMMISSIONER APPLING: Thank you.

13 JUDGE DIPPELL: Anything from the attorneys?

14 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

15 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you ma'am.

16 Vernetta Layton?

17 VERNETTA LAYTON,

18 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies

19 as follows:

20 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you spell your name
21 for the court reporter and then give us your comments.

22 MS. LAYTON: Vernetta Layton,

23 V-E-R-N-E-T-T-A L-A-Y-T-O-N.

24 My question is you guys have -- Laclede Gas
25 has programs for people who have children eight and

1 under and the elderly. What about the people in between
2 that have teenagers that still need help?

3 I'm a single parent. I have three
4 teenagers. I work two jobs and I also go to school.
5 It's hard like hell to still pay the bills. I'm tired
6 24/7 trying to pay the gas bill, the rent, and
7 everything else. But when I call for some help, they
8 say they can't help me because I'm not in the program.
9 They give me all numbers and all they tell me if you
10 have kids under eight or are you elderly or is somebody
11 sick. And I'm a healthy woman, but I probably won't be
12 for too long, from years of working two full-time jobs.

13 Both of my daughters are working. They're
14 missing school because they're in college and trying to
15 work to pay the bills and now they want a rate increase.

16 I just got an increase from Laclede because
17 of the budget billing that I'm on. And I'm thinking
18 that's the rate increase, but the rate increase hasn't
19 even happened yet. And I'm tired. And I'm frustrated.
20 And I know your guys problem. You're trying your best
21 and I know people need raises who work at the gas
22 company too.

23 But I need to know where I can get some help
24 at. I've got teenagers that can't get -- if my kids
25 were eight or under, Laclede Gas would help me from

1 other sources, St. Vincent Hospitals or an agency. But
2 now my kids are big kids, I can't get any help from
3 anybody.

4 And I'm on a 12 month program and they tell
5 me if I can get it extended for a week or two because I
6 can't pay 155 every month. You know, I can pay a
7 hundred, but I can't pay no more. I'm just going to get
8 cut off. And I can't borrow money from everyone else,
9 who's trying to come up and pay their own bill. And now
10 it's 155 and it's going to 158, 158 to 161. Now, it
11 went from 161 to 207. I got to pay by the 29th. I'm
12 not going to have it. I cannot pay 200. I was
13 struggling with 155. Now, it jumps to 207.

14 The more hours I pick up, the more bills
15 take. And I can't work three jobs, stay in school, and
16 take care of my kids. I got big kids. I have to be at
17 home sometime to watch them. To see that they're not
18 out in the street or whatever.

19 It's just hard. I'm not complaining. I
20 just need to know if there's some discount for the women
21 who falls in between that has teenage kids and don't
22 have it. I've got ten numbers that Laclede gave me
23 today. All of them, we don't have the funds, you're
24 kids are too old. You've got to get a loan. Because my
25 kids are big kids.

1 They need hot water to take a shower too.
2 You know, they got to wash -- they want to feel normal,
3 like other kids.

4 I was in a house for three years without gas
5 because I couldn't afford it. One, I was staying with
6 somebody and they said they were paying the bills. I
7 found out the gas bill was not paid. I didn't know
8 that, but I fought through that, because the gas was in
9 my name, so I have to pay that. I don't know how much
10 that bill was because I ended up leaving that house
11 because it was too cold for my kids last winter to keep
12 staying in that house. My kids are going to school sick
13 all the time.

14 You know, I had to warm it up because I
15 didn't want the pipes to be messed up and then the water
16 to stain, you know, the house would get really bad. So
17 now, I'm in an apartment trying to do the same thing.
18 The bill is still high.

19 You know, all I want is a discount. I can't
20 stop you guys if they get a raise or whatever. Because
21 I know everybody needs to be paid too. But I need
22 somewhere where they give discounts to single parents
23 that have got teenage kids.

24 You know, everybody has -- nobody said
25 anything about the single parents with teenage kids that

1 need help. I mean, I can't get another job. I just
2 can't do it and keep school up. I have to go to school.
3 I work at Wash U. I have to go to school for the job I
4 have.

5 You know, I got a part-time job to suffice
6 for the bills, you know. And I've worked overtime at
7 Wash U where I've put in 40 hours a week at my part-time
8 job. By the time I come home, I'm dead on my feet, but
9 I've got to stay up and I've got to make sure they're
10 doing their homework and everything's getting done.

11 You know, I just want to know if there's a
12 discount for the single parents in my position.

13 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you for your comments.
14 Commissioner Murray?

15 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: Well, you might just
16 try to talk to some of the people that are here tonight
17 representing the staff and find out if there's anything
18 that might work for you.

19 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

20 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: We appreciate your comments,
22 ma'am. Is there anything else from the attorneys?

23 MR. PENDERGAST: No.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Patricia Dennis? I
25 don't see her. And that was the last name I had on this

1 list. Is there anyone else that wanted to testify?

2 DORIS MAGWOOD,

3 after being first duly sworn to tell the truth testifies
4 as follows:

5 JUDGE DIPPELL: Could you state your name
6 and spell it for the court reporter, please, and then
7 give us your comments.

8 MS. MAGWOOD: Doris Magwood, D-O-R-I-S
9 M-A-G-W-O-O-D.

10 I took the risk of not repeating anything
11 that was said tonight because I agree with the
12 experience with the gas company. I believe that the gas
13 company does not deserve an increase in rate. I noticed
14 this past winter, '06, that there was an increase in the
15 cost of gas that was passed along to the customers.

16 Now, some of the facts made in a manner with
17 people who say they're on a fixed income. I don't use
18 that term, simply because if we are salaried employed
19 our incomes do not fluctuate that much so to say that,
20 you know, we're on a fixed income is insulting to the
21 rest of us who do not collect Social Security or
22 whatever because we do have a budget.

23 My gas -- the cost of gas from '05, '06 from
24 the winter, went from \$350 a month to \$699. Roughly
25 double. When I spoke to the gas company about this, the

1 lady said, you know, we have to pass on the increase and
2 supposedly, the increase was not supposed to go to the
3 people.

4 I thought I did all the right things in the
5 past, total rehab, replaced everything. I have dry heat
6 in my house, not hot water heat, so there isn't that
7 many problems with the heater going all day.

8 However, the gas company decided that
9 history and usage should be the way they deal with my
10 gas. They started at the time I moved into the house.
11 But history and usage, as opposed to what I actually
12 use. So I could never get them to move this policy
13 forward in terms of looking at my personal situation as
14 opposed to a history of usage. So I totally redid the
15 house.

16 And so I don't think they deserve an
17 increase. They really don't because the cost that was
18 passed onto us in '06 should not be tacked on a higher
19 cost by saying, now we're seeking a rate increase. We
20 already got that without calling it a rate increase. So
21 they really don't deserve it because it's really
22 ridiculous the way it's being, you know, sort of put
23 anywhere, thinking that most of us aren't paying
24 attention to what's going on. We are.

25 The problem of feeling powerless, even going

1 through a formal hearing process is like, so what can we
2 do. I work with homeless people and I notice in 1000
3 clients, two out of five have a problem with their gas
4 bill. They can't pay it. So they move along and double
5 up with relatives, friends, whatever, go to the
6 shelters. They cannot pay their gas bill.

7 And as the woman who talked about your
8 client, the population, looking at what the needs are
9 and what kind of policies can be made in terms of being
10 sensitive to this population. And you are a utility
11 company, the only thing going in town. And it's not
12 like we can go and change like we can with the phone
13 company and that sort of thing.

14 We are essentially, you know, in a situation
15 where we are capitalized and we're talking utilities in
16 general, but Laclede in specific.

17 They do not deserve a rate increase. They
18 really don't. They had one this winter. They didn't
19 call it a rate hike, but it was indeed a rate hike.

20 Thank you.

21 JUDGE DIPPELL: Thank you, ma'am.
22 Commissioner Murray?

23 COMMISSIONER MURRAY: No questions.

24 JUDGE DIPPELL: Commissioner Appling?

25 COMMISSIONER APPLING: No questions.

1 JUDGE DIPPELL: Okay. Anything from the
2 attorneys?

3 MR. PENDERGAST: No questions.

4 JUDGE DIPPELL: All right. Thank you ma'am
5 for your comments. Is there anyone else who wanted to
6 testify? I don't see anyone else.

7 I really appreciate you coming out and
8 sticking in here. I really appreciate the attendance
9 and if you have friends or family who were unable to
10 come tonight, please let them know that we are having
11 some other hearings. And if they got the information
12 from the newspaper, please pass that along.

13 And if they are unable to make comments,
14 they can be made on our website. They can also be made
15 in writing and sent to the Commission.

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