

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

STATE OF MISSOURI

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

LOCAL PUBLIC HEARING

In the Matter of the Request)
of The Empire District Electric)
Company d/b/a Liberty for) File No. ER-2024-0261
Authority to File Tariffs)
Increasing Rates for Electric)
Service Provided to Customers)
in its Missouri Service Area)

TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2025
6:00 p.m. - 8:56 p.m.

Southwest Baptist University
McClelland Joe Roberts Room (Dining Hall)
600 University Avenue
Bolivar, MO 65613

VOLUME 4
Pages 1 - 68

CHARLES HATCHER, Presiding
SENIOR REGULATORY LAW JUDGE

KAYLA HAHN, Chair,
MAIDA J. COLEMAN, (WebEx)
GLEN KOLKMEYER, (WebEx)
JOHN MITCHELL,
COMMISSIONERS

Stenographically Reported By:
Beverly Jean Bentch, RPR, CCR No. 640

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1 The following proceedings began at 7:22 p.m.:

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Let's go on the record. Today
3 is July 22, 2025. The current time is 7:22 p.m. The
4 question and answer portion, which you just participated
5 in, has been concluded. If you attended that, I do hope
6 that you were able to get all of your questions
7 answered. We will now be starting the comment portion
8 of the hearing. That's where you will be providing
9 testimony to the Commissioners.

10 The Missouri Public Service Commission has set
11 this time for a local public hearing to give members of
12 the public a chance to comment about Liberty's request
13 for a rate increase, which is Case No. ER-2024-0261. My
14 name is Charles Hatcher, and I'm the Regulatory Law
15 Judge that will be overseeing this hearing.

16 The Commission regulates the rates charged by
17 public utility companies in Missouri to ensure that
18 those rates are just and reasonable. The Commission
19 also regulates the quality of service and safety of
20 operations of public utilities.

21 The Commission is made up of five
22 Commissioners. The Commission's Chair is Kayla Hahn
23 with Commissioners Maida Coleman, Glen Kolkmeier and
24 John Mitchell. There is one vacancy at the moment.
25 Those Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and

1 confirmed by the Senate. The Commission employs a staff
2 of engineers, accountants, attorneys, financial analysts
3 and other specialists in the field of utility
4 regulation.

5 With me today are Chair Kayla Hahn and
6 Commissioner John Mitchell. Also on our telephone line
7 we have our other two Commissioners: Commissioner Maida
8 Coleman and Commissioner Glen Kolkmeier. Chair Hahn,
9 would you like to make any opening remarks?

10 CHAIR HAHN: Good evening everyone. Thank you
11 all for coming out this evening and sharing your
12 comments with us. On behalf of the entire Commission,
13 we welcome you. And this is the beginning of a rate
14 case process and it's the only part of the process where
15 we really get to engage or hear from the public
16 directly. So we will be listening and taking your
17 comments to heart. And you know, we look forward to
18 hearing from you. We're traveling all around Southwest
19 Missouri over the course of this week to make sure we
20 can touch as many communities as possible. So again
21 thank you for coming out tonight and we look forward to
22 hearing from you.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And now I would
24 ask the parties who are here to go ahead and enter their
25 appearance for the record. For the Empire District

1 Electric Company doing business as Liberty.

2 MS. CARTER: Diana Carter.

3 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And for the
4 Commission Staff.

5 MR. GRAHAM: Paul Graham for the Staff.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And the Office of
7 the Public Counsel.

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Nathan Williams appearing on
9 behalf of the Office of the Public Counsel and the
10 public.

11 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. There are
12 some intervenors that are participating in this case as
13 well. I did see one of their counsel in attendance. If
14 any of those intervenors would like to introduce
15 themselves to be on the record.

16 MR. COFFMAN: Your Honor, John Coffman on
17 behalf of the Consumers Council of Missouri.

18 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. Any other
19 parties? Thank you. This is a very well attended
20 hearing and we've had several of those. And that is
21 positive news. The Commission, as the Chair mentioned,
22 would like to hear from the public and make sure and
23 give everyone that opportunity.

24 What we'll be doing is limiting comments to
25 three minutes each. That should be enough to inform the

1 Commissioners of what your concerns are, what your
2 issues are with your bill, but we also want to make sure
3 that we have time for your neighbors who also would like
4 to speak. There is no need to repeat testimony. If
5 someone has said the same thing that you would like to
6 testify to, it is perfectly acceptable to say that you
7 agree with that previous speaker.

8 And I would ask that everyone please be polite
9 and courteous and respect other people's opinions just
10 as you would hope that they would be polite and
11 courteous and respect your opinions. We do have 29
12 witnesses signed up. Thank you, Forrest. I appreciate
13 that.

14 I will be calling the list of witnesses.
15 We're going to try something a little different because
16 these hearings have been very well attended, and the
17 Commission has found that we want to make sure that we
18 have everyone's testimony and that everyone gets a
19 chance to testify and that we don't go too late into the
20 evening where some people aren't able to stay. So what
21 we're going to do is I'm going to ask that all of the
22 witnesses who have signed up and who would like to come
23 up, I'm going to ask you all in mass I'm going to swear
24 you in, because to hear your testimony you're sworn in
25 as witnesses. So in a different court proceeding maybe

1 with less witnesses we would do this one at a time. You
2 would come to the witness podium and I would ask you to
3 please swear to tell the truth and then you would say
4 that you will or that you affirm that you will and then
5 we'd move on to your comments.

6 To try and save time with that tonight, I'm
7 going to simply ask all of the witnesses who have signed
8 up to confirm that they will be telling the truth this
9 evening. If you have signed up and you will be telling
10 the truth this evening, you can confirm that, please now
11 say I do. Thank you all.

12 After I call your name to come up to give your
13 comments and you give your comments, I would ask that
14 you stay for just a second. We do have some attorneys
15 representing parties here. We have Commissioners. And
16 any of those might have a question, a follow up question
17 for you. So just stay at the podium for just a second.

18 And the last thing I want to mention is the
19 Commissioners will not be able to answer any questions.
20 The part of the hearing that started at six o'clock was
21 the question and answer period, and that's where you got
22 to ask the company, Commission Staff, the Office of the
23 Public Counsel. The Commissioners aren't able to answer
24 questions because they are deciding the case. This
25 proceeds just like a court case. And they are the

1 effective judges in this case. So they won't be giving
2 any opinions or being able to answer any questions
3 because we haven't had the evidentiary hearing yet. So
4 we haven't heard the evidence that the company and all
5 the parties are going to put on and that's what they'll
6 be making their decision on, as well as your comments
7 here tonight. That was a lot. Thank you all for
8 bearing with me.

9 With that in mind, let's get started with our
10 testimony. I'm going to start calling names. I
11 apologize in advance for my mispronunciation of your
12 name. It's going to happen and I will do my best to
13 correct that. With that, let's get started. Dale and
14 Emmylou Burkes. I'd like to go just one at a time. If
15 Dale Burkes or Emmylou Burkes. Okay. We will circle
16 back and ask them at the end. Dusty Ross. I'd also
17 like to ask -- I'd also like to announce the next few
18 names so that the next few witnesses can get ready. We
19 have Dusty Ross coming up to the stand. James Chatham.
20 Thank you, sir. And Eric Kirchberg and then Ronald
21 Condren. Dusty Ross. Thank you. You've already been
22 sworn in. Please go ahead and give the Commission your
23 comments.

24 MR. ROSS: First off, thanks for being here
25 tonight. I'm assuming you guys have traveled, well

1 traveled here in the last couple months. Couple things
2 that I have to say. Number one from my personal
3 experience last year around the month of May I didn't
4 get a bill from Liberty. So you know, called them, said
5 hey, didn't get a bill. They said -- I said I need to
6 pay my bill. They said you have a zero balance. I said
7 I promise I don't have a zero balance.

8 Like I know I've used electric and water. I
9 said can I just mail in a check, my bill is usually
10 about 400 bucks a month. They said no. What I was told
11 on the phone was if you have a zero balance, we won't
12 take a payment from you. Okay. Great.

13 April, same thing. Called them, you have a
14 zero balance. Again, I promise I used electric. May,
15 June, July, August, September, all the way up to March
16 of this year and I finally, you know, I get a letter in
17 the mail from Liberty that says hey, we know we haven't
18 been sending you bills. I was like that's awesome. You
19 can send me a letter saying we know you're not getting
20 bills but you can't send me a bill. They're like, you
21 know, be on the lookout, you should be getting
22 something.

23 So then I get like the big manila envelope
24 from Liberty all at once in March of this year, has
25 eight months' worth of bills to the tune of like \$4,800.

1 So you know, of course I call them. Hey, finally got my
2 bill and, you know, the question I have is I understand
3 they have smart meters. But if I want to dispute my
4 bill say in August, how do I go about doing that because
5 I didn't get my bill for August until March of the next
6 year?

7 Same thing with June and July. They're like
8 we could go back and look and tell you. If you can't
9 send me my bill, how do I trust that what you're going
10 to tell me what my bill was is going to be accurate. So
11 questions like that. I've heard these stories from
12 everybody.

13 Now, my personal thing is I know a lot of the
14 Public Service Commission by first name. I talk to
15 them. I'm on City Council here in town. I have people
16 complain all the time. Literally they call the PSC.
17 They'll come to my office. I'll be like hey, call the
18 PSC, file a complaint, do this and do that. In those
19 conversations we have people that, you know, they can't
20 -- rent is high here, utilities are high here, and
21 people have to make the real decision of do I buy my
22 medicine or do I pay my utility bill. That should never
23 be a choice.

24 You know, there's been testimony tonight we
25 have a co-op that operates some. They're inside the

1 city limits in some areas. They're 9-1/2 cents a
2 kilowatt hour. They service the same amount of people
3 that Liberty does in this area. Liberty continues to
4 raise rates because of the cost of doing business. I'm
5 assuming the cost of doing business continues to go up
6 because I can only imagine when we had our townhall with
7 the Office of Public Counsel the amount of money they're
8 spending to correct their billing issue has got to be an
9 ungodly amount of money. And so with that factored in
10 in the Q&A, they made \$137 million in profits last year
11 and they're asking for \$150 million increase.

12 The mayor back there, I was talking to him and
13 he had a great quote. He said why would they approve a
14 higher than average return on equity in an area that has
15 a lower than average cost of living.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Sir, your time has expired.
17 If you could just finish your thought.

18 MR. ROSS: That was my thought. Just take
19 that into consideration. Our poverty rate is 21
20 percent. We're already paying the highest utility rates
21 in Missouri. People can't afford to live here. And I
22 deal with that and hear that every single day. Please
23 take that into consideration when you're thinking about
24 this increase.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Ross. If you

1 could come back, Mr. Ross, we do have a question for
2 you.

3 MR. WILLIAMS: A quick one. Have you had any
4 billing issues since March?

5 MR. ROSS: Yeah. It's one of those since
6 March I'll get a bill, it will have credit, it won't
7 have a credit, it will have an amount, it will have a
8 different amount. I'll get three bills a month, two
9 bills a month. It's literally when you get a letter
10 from, you know, Liberty in the mail, it's like the
11 greatest guessing game of all time. Like is it going to
12 be three bills, is it going to be two bills, am I going
13 to have a credit, am I going to owe something. I don't
14 know that I've gotten a legitimate bill that's accurate
15 from Liberty probably since April, May of last year.

16 MR. WILLIAMS: I asked about after March.
17 Have you had issues with your June bill or your July
18 bill or do you know?

19 MR. ROSS: I don't think I've gotten one for
20 July yet. My June one, it had a credit on it. I had a
21 \$4,700 bill. So I know I don't have a credit. I did
22 have -- I think I had a \$363 credit on it.

23 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

24 MR. ROSS: No problem.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Mr. Ross, I just want to

1 confirm for our court reporter, your name is spelled
2 D-u-s-t-y, last name R-o-s-s?

3 MR. ROSS: That is correct.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir.

5 MR. ROSS: No problem.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: In my drive for efficiency, I
7 need to make sure and confirm spellings for our court
8 reporter who is writing down a transcript. James
9 Chatham. Thank you, sir. Please come on down, and
10 confirm that you are going to be telling the truth, you
11 already agreed to that?

12 MR. CHATHAM: Yes, sir.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: And your name is spelled
14 common spelling?

15 MR. CHATHAM: C-h-a-t-h-a-m, Charlie hotel
16 alpha tango hotel alpha Mike.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Excellent. I like it, sir.
18 Please go ahead and give us your comments.

19 MR. CHATHAM: Yes, sir. I'm also a veteran as
20 you can tell.

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Yes, sir. I've got three
22 minutes on the clock.

23 MR. CHATHAM: Yes, sir. I'll make it short
24 and sweet. The problem I have is I'm living on my
25 retirement pension. It's kind of hard for me to every

1 time something comes up they chisel a little bit more
2 out. It's getting more difficult to pay my bills
3 because I don't work, I just live on my pension. And I
4 think I can speak for a lot of people in here that feel
5 the same way, because it's not only me, it's everybody
6 that's living like that.

7 A lot of us here live on our retirement
8 pensions, and it's just that much less that we're going
9 to have to spend on everything else, gas, food,
10 whatever. That's all I have. Thank you. Anything
11 else?

12 JUDGE HATCHER: No, sir. Thank you. I
13 appreciate you coming out tonight. Eric Kirchberg. Did
14 I get that kind of close?

15 MR. KIRCHBERG: Close, Kirchberg.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Hold on just a second. I'd
17 like to call the next couple names. Ronald Condren,
18 Wanda Johnson, Lucas Roberts. You three will be up
19 next. Not all together, one at a time. And Eric
20 Kirchberg. Eric is spelled E-r-i-c and Kirchberg --

21 MR. KIRCHBERG: K-i-r-c-h-b-e-r-g.

22 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. And to
23 confirm, you had already stated that you would be
24 telling the truth?

25 MR. KIRCHBERG: Yes.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Please go ahead and give the
2 Commission your statement and I will start your clock.

3 MR. KIRCHBERG: Okay. I'm here today to
4 express my strong opposition to the Liberty Utilities'
5 request for a rate increase. In my opinion, Liberty's
6 poor management and billing practices do not warrant a
7 rate increase. Customers in my town have experienced
8 irregular billing with some going months without
9 receiving a bill. Others have been double billed or
10 have had to repeatedly call to request a bill.

11 The lack of accountability and transparency is
12 unacceptable especially considering Liberty's
13 significant profits. Notably Liberty's profits
14 decreased from \$556 million in 2023 to \$316 million in
15 2024. Rather than increasing rates, I believe Liberty
16 should focus on improving its billing practices and
17 collecting revenue from its existing customers. This
18 could potentially make up the 200 million difference in
19 profits they lost. Moreover, most of our community
20 already are struggling to pay its bills at this current
21 rate. If Liberty raises rates again, I fear the impact
22 on our most vulnerable citizens will be devastating.

23 How many of our customers does Liberty
24 anticipate will have their services shut off due to
25 nonpayment or insufficient payment in the coming months

1 after the rate hike. We've already seen numerous
2 citizens attending meetings at our city hall with
3 desperate for solutions to afford their current bills.
4 Many are worried about their prospect and other rate
5 hikes and are looking for our city for help.
6 Furthermore, Liberty's recent survey asking about
7 community give-backs and community support is ironic
8 given the company's lack of investment in our community.

9 Our town's streetlights, which we pay for
10 through our municipal agreement, have gone unrepaired
11 for months and some even years. We repeatedly report
12 these and still they don't get fixed. We had a recent
13 structure fire in our town two days ago. We called for
14 Liberty to come disconnect the meter. It took over 40
15 minutes for someone to arrive as we don't have somebody
16 from Liberty stationed in our city.

17 It's clear that Liberty prioritizes profits
18 over people and communities' well-beings. I urge the
19 Commission to carefully consider the impact of the rate
20 increase on our community and hold Liberty accountable
21 for its service failures. I request that Liberty
22 provide detail information on the expected impact of the
23 rate hike to customers in my area including the
24 anticipated number of service disconnects. Thank you
25 for your time.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Mr. Kirchberg, you
2 mentioned streetlights and you had an agreement. I'm
3 looking on your shirt and I have a question if the city
4 you named is Buffalo, correct?

5 MR. KIRCHBERG: Correct, the city of Buffalo.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you.

7 MR. KIRCHBERG: You're welcome.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: We have another question.

9 MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah. You're an alderman of
10 the city of Buffalo?

11 MR. KIRCHBERG: I am.

12 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I appreciate
14 you coming out tonight. Ronald Condren.

15 MR. CONDREN: It's Ronald Condren.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Condren. Thank you. And the
17 last name is, how do you spell that?

18 MR. CONDREN: C-o-n-d-r-e-n.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. And I'll go
20 ahead and set your timer. Please go ahead and give us
21 your comments.

22 MR. CONDREN: I don't understand how people --
23 it says on here that their software system is being
24 worked on. Yet we're having a billing system of what
25 we're doing and they're charging us X amount of dollars

1 for doing that. The Commission is saying that they
2 think that they deserve to have that amount of money
3 being given to them, which is 121. I don't understand
4 how \$121 million can be there when we're at 9-1/2
5 percent rate of return.

6 Tell me what else I can put my money in that
7 will give me a 9-1/2 percent return. We farm.
8 Everybody talks about groceries being so high. We don't
9 get anywhere near a 9-1/2 percent return, not on the
10 farm anyway. I think that there are so many people that
11 have already mentioned their needs of how if you're
12 retired and you're getting your money from social
13 security or from your retirement system that you worked
14 out of, I worked for the Missouri Teachers Association,
15 and they limit you to 6 percent increase is the maximum
16 for inflation. And I don't see how you can possibly
17 expect us to be paying bills that are going to be a
18 9-1/2 percent increase. And their planning then is not
19 that good or they'd be setting money aside just like me
20 and you do in order to pay their bills that they see in
21 the future instead of expecting to borrow money from us
22 and have us pay it off over the next 13 to 15 years.
23 Thank you.

24 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Condren. I
25 appreciate you coming out tonight. Wanda Johnson. And

1 Ms. Johnson will be followed by Lucas Roberts and
2 Clarence Wells. And Wanda Johnson both is common
3 spelling; is that correct?

4 MS. JOHNSON: Yes.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I'll set your
6 timer. Please go ahead with your comments.

7 MS. JOHNSON: My comment would be that my
8 concern with Liberty Utilities is the fact that they are
9 so incompetent in their billing and it's been over a
10 year. You get no bill, you get two bills in one day and
11 another one the next day after that. It's just totally
12 -- If it was at a business here in town, their
13 accounting department would be fired. They spend a lot
14 of money just on postage sending all these bills out. I
15 mean, we got three in one month. Some people get ten.

16 My other concern with Liberty Utilities is the
17 fact that we have no choice, a lack of choice. I am
18 very fortunate that I live outside of town but my
19 business is in town. I'm on Southwest Electric out in
20 the county. My children live here in town and they're
21 on Liberty Utilities. Their bill is as big as their
22 mortgage. Now when did that become okay. Your utility
23 bills should not be as big as your mortgage or bigger,
24 larger than your mortgage payment. And they're young.
25 They're in their thirties and forties. I don't know how

1 people who are on social security can afford their
2 medicine, their utility bill. Their home is probably
3 paid for. But how can they afford it. I don't see how
4 they can. So I would say the biggest thing is the lack
5 of choice. I don't understand why we don't have a
6 choice.

7 On my road out here in the county Liberty has
8 poles on one side of the road and Southwest Electric has
9 poles on the same road on the opposite side. I think we
10 should have a choice. I don't think we should be -- it
11 should be a monopoly where we have no choice. It's
12 ridiculous. And they've got us and there's nothing we
13 can do about it.

14 So the community feels like nobody is helping.
15 Nobody can do anything about it. We've been told it's
16 all over Facebook on our community chat why go tonight,
17 nothing is going to change, they're not going to do
18 anything. So I'm asking you to do something. I'm not
19 just asking you. I'm going to ask my state rep also to
20 do something. We need to be deregulated and have a
21 choice on who provides our electricity so it's
22 competitive because here in the United States of America
23 it's about capitalism and competition and there's no
24 competition here in the city of Bolivar. It's a
25 monopoly. And Liberty Utilities has got us by the short

1 hairs.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Johnson. I
3 appreciate you coming out tonight. Lucas Roberts.
4 L-u-c-a-s R-o-b-e-r-t-s; is that correct?

5 MR. ROBERTS: You got it.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I'll set your
7 timer. Please go ahead.

8 MR. ROBERTS: How much time do I have?

9 JUDGE HATCHER: Three minutes.

10 MR. ROBERTS: Three minutes. I just wanted to
11 start off and introduce myself. My name is Lucas. I've
12 been living here since I was six months old. I'm 32 and
13 a half now. I actually grew up spending more nights at
14 Wanda Johnson's house with her son Jacob than I can
15 count when I was a kid. She actually echoed a lot of
16 the same sentiment I want to echo tonight.

17 My American dream is that I could just spend
18 as much time with my family as possible. So that means
19 my wife staying home with our two-and-a-half year old
20 son which I'm able to have them do now. With the rising
21 costs and everything, I've had to pick up a side hustle
22 which I invented a little product I 3D print in my
23 garage and I sell it.

24 With rising costs between food, inflation, my
25 student loan payment plan has been rescinded at the

1 federal level so I'm going to have to start paying more
2 dollars there and now this on top of the rate increases
3 they had with water utilities back in the fall. This is
4 getting ridiculous. I don't know what other recourse
5 there is. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau at
6 the federal level would be a great option but it's been
7 gutted at the federal level.

8 Obviously the OPC is recommending no rate
9 increase strictly based on the bad quality of service
10 that Liberty is able to provide our community. As Wanda
11 said, this is not a retail choice state. We are stuck
12 with this. I was raised to fear the big bad government
13 tax man growing up. And as I get older and older, the
14 only people I fear the corporations who have kind of an
15 oligopoly set up, or a monopoly I guess in this case,
16 that are really levying a tax that the only
17 representation or recourse I have is to come here and
18 complain about it along with the rest of these people.

19 I really wish you could have been around, and
20 I know you couldn't have from a procedural standpoint,
21 for the question and answer session, because there were
22 a lot of mad fixed income folks in here that didn't
23 realize they needed to stick around and complain at this
24 point.

25 You know, from an economic standpoint, it's

1 harmful to business for this area. We're already in a
2 low cost of living area. My brother build a spec home,
3 a really, really nice economical two-bed, two-bath house
4 in town on Liberty. My father is a real estate agent.
5 He's the listing agent on the home. They've had several
6 people call and say I would love to make an offer on
7 this house but what utility company is it on. They say
8 it's a deal breaker because it's Liberty. That house
9 has sat on the market at a fair market price because
10 it's on Liberty. This is harming my family directly.
11 This is harming my American dream.

12 You know, on the back on this nice
13 multi-colored pamphlet they handed out it says what
14 options do I have if I can't afford a rate increase. It
15 says we've got flexible payment plans. We've got -- And
16 then there are multiple resources within the community
17 that can help you pay. Again, putting more stress on
18 the community to front -- The only improvement that I
19 can see for this is not infrastructural as much as it is
20 just increasing shareholder value for Algonquin Power &
21 Light I think is the actual parent company name.

22 The role for good government in my eyes is to
23 step in where the free market cannot. We are not under
24 a free market right now with respect to utilities. So I
25 think it's your job to come in and say no, we're not

1 going to let this happen, we're not going to hurt the
2 city of Bolivar. Thank you so much for your time.

3 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Roberts. I
4 appreciate you being here tonight. Clarence Wells,
5 Donald Kelly and Candy, I don't know how to pronounce
6 it.

7 MS. FABRES: That's okay. Fabres.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Fabres. Thank you. Clarence
9 Wells will be first. Clarence Wells. All right. We'll
10 back come back and call him at the end. Donald Kelley.
11 Thank you, Mr. Kelley. Let me spell your name for the
12 record and I'll ask you to confirm that's correct.
13 Donald, common spelling, Kelley is K-e-l-l-e-y?

14 MR. KELLEY: Correct, Your Honor.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I'll set your
16 timer for three minutes and please go ahead.

17 MR. KELLEY: Thank you. I need to ask or not
18 ask, the question time is over. It's time where the
19 tires meet the road. Liberty has to step up. I live in
20 a fixed income community. My 700 square foot apartment
21 -- years old. Why am I paying \$300 a month in
22 utilities? That's exorbitant.

23 I live on disability and disability only.
24 I've gone to the office. Like the gentleman before me,
25 yeah, you can look into flexible payment plans. Okay.

1 How do I do that? Your bill has to be in arrears.
2 There's been times on -- let's talk about the bill.
3 There's been times on my bill I was current when I first
4 moved in up and to the point you switched over to your
5 new billing system. I didn't see a bill for four
6 months. All of a sudden the bill I have today due the
7 12th of August is for \$1,352 and I get no assistance.
8 So my choices are I can pay towards your bill or I can
9 eat. Which would you prefer me to do? That's a scary
10 situation to be in. I'm not the only one.

11 The deregulation would be nice. I did get
12 some clarification on what would be needed to entertain
13 Southwest Electric to come in here and maybe let us
14 listen to what their proposal is. That's all I'm asking
15 for is a proposal from a company that others speak very
16 highly of. I am sure there are others that don't speak
17 highly of that company as well. But if you're going to
18 raise my water rates 30 percent and the next year try to
19 raise my utilities 9 percent, how does my 2-1/2 percent
20 cost of living increase. Do the math. I'm befuddled.
21 I'm trying to figure out how I make it work.

22 I simply don't have an answer, and I ask that
23 all of you take a good hard look at this and really put
24 the customer first over profits. Companies are allowed
25 to make money. Companies are not allowed to steal from

1 people. That's all I have to say.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Kelley. I
3 appreciate you being here tonight. Yes. Can you give
4 me one more hint.

5 MS. FEBRES: Thank you very much for the
6 opportunity to speak, and I want to preface this by
7 saying I moved from Houston a couple years ago to take
8 care of my mom. So everything is deregulated there,
9 which is really nice. It's great for the customer.

10 I get here and what I found is getting
11 multiple bills every single month. Every bill is
12 different. When I try to call in to get it resolved,
13 you never get the same answer. So like one gentleman
14 said it's a guessing game. You don't really know what
15 you're going to get or what you actually owe. So we're
16 in the office here frequently. We're calling and
17 nothing is ever resolved ever.

18 The other problem I have is just lack of
19 transparency. I worked for older people on fixed
20 incomes. I'm finding they're not turning on anything.
21 Not using their dishwasher, washing machines, air
22 conditioning because they can't afford it. One lady has
23 a two-bedroom house and her bill was \$1,200. So it's
24 just wrong. There's got to be a better way. I mean, it
25 would be different if we saw the value for the dollar

1 but there's none. There really isn't. I've never seen
2 anything quite like this. So please take that into
3 consideration.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I just want to
5 confirm the spelling of your name. Candy, common
6 spelling, and then F-e-b --

7 MS. FEBRES: F-e-b-r-e-s, yes.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, ma'am. I
9 appreciate you being here tonight.

10 MR. WILLIAMS: I do have one question.

11 JUDGE HATCHER: Yes, we do have a question.

12 MR. WILLIAMS: It's about timing. You
13 mentioned billing issues. Are you still experiencing
14 those?

15 MS. FEBRES: Yes, every month. It never goes
16 away, ever. Multiple bills.

17 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

18 MS. FEBRES: Multiple bills. It just never
19 goes away. You never get the same answer any time you
20 call. I call multiple times a week and get different
21 answers depending on who I talk to.

22 MR. KELLEY: I've gotten shut-off notices
23 before I've gotten a bill. Explain that. That's
24 realistic of how Liberty bills their clients.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, ma'am. I

1 appreciate it. It looks like first initial C and then
2 the last name might be an S-n-e-d. Does that ring any
3 bells for anyone? Okay. We'll move on and circle back
4 to that name. R. Walk or Walz. Just a first initial
5 and then a last name of W-a-l and then another letter
6 being a c or an s. Okay. Circle back to them. Mark
7 Galvan. While Mr. Galvan makes his way, the next name
8 will be Tana Gallion. Then after that Leon Wirth.
9 Mr. Galvan, before you get started, let me confirm the
10 spelling of your name. Mark, common spelling, and then
11 Galvan is G-a-l-v-a-n; is that correct?

12 MR. GALVAN: Yep.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I will start your
14 timer. Please go ahead and tell us your comments.

15 MR. GALVAN: This is a current billing issue.
16 We've been attending these meetings, me and my better
17 half, since they've been having them. We had some bad
18 billing issues. So they assigned me a person. And I
19 actually got one of the first meters. I was really
20 surprised. Anyhow, we was going along. We were doing
21 things at night, trying to save money. We got a big
22 bill. And I called them. I said, because they gave me
23 a contact person, I called them and she said yeah, it
24 looks fine. We didn't have any issues this time. So I
25 paid the bill.

1 Next month it came in. It was still larger
2 than normal, but we paid the bill. Next month after
3 that got no bill. Another month went by. Life got in
4 the way. Didn't call. There was no bill at all. So I
5 went down -- I was down at the office on Broadway, very
6 nice lady behind the window there. She was working on
7 an issue with one of my tenants.

8 I said, by the way, what's my bill. She goes
9 well, you don't owe any money, I have a credit. She
10 goes can't tell you where it came from but you don't owe
11 any money. And this month we had a credit and the bill
12 is significantly smaller. My bill is like \$100 this
13 month. So they're still having billing issues.

14 I don't understand after a year of this
15 they're still having problems. They don't know what the
16 issues are. They don't know how to correct them. So
17 you can't trust a bill. Is it correct when they say
18 it's right or are they going to give you a credit down
19 the road. They're inconsistent. It doesn't make sense
20 to me that you'd even think about giving them a rate
21 increase when they can't do the job they have now. Is
22 it going to get better or worse? That's all I've got to
23 say.

24 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Galvan. I
25 appreciate you being here tonight. Tana Gallion. I'm

1 going to spell your name first and then ask you to
2 confirm it. Tana is T-a-n-a.

3 MS. GALLION: Yes.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Am I pronouncing that right?

5 MS. GALLION: Yes, it's Tana like Montana.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you.

7 MS. GALLION: Of course.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: And Gallion, G-a-l-l-i-o-n.

9 MS. GALLION: Yes, sir.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Let me start your
11 timer and please go ahead and give us your comments.

12 MS. GALLION: Good evening. I'm Tana Gallion.
13 I'm grateful for this opportunity to express my concerns
14 with the proposed rate increase and make it known that I
15 fiercely oppose it.

16 My family and I live in Willard. Both my
17 husband and I work. Our daughter is seven. Despite the
18 fact that we are a hard working American family, more
19 times than not we live paycheck to paycheck. It seems
20 as though everything has gone up in price this year.
21 Our rent, child care, water and sewer went up by about
22 20 bucks. Groceries are still up. I have a seven year
23 old. She can eat a lot. The gas company is wanting to
24 raise their rates too by about 14 percent. Thank
25 goodness I was able to get cheaper internet. Guess what

1 doesn't increase to help offset the rising cost of
2 everything we use and consume? Our income.

3 When things like rent and utilities increase
4 and income does not, the budget has to shift. I don't
5 get Starbucks. We eat out maybe once a month. Nor do
6 we get out and do a lot because we can't afford it. So
7 this 30 to 40 percent increase, depending on usage, that
8 Liberty is trying to impose would mean that our bill
9 would increase by give or take \$41 a month and the few
10 things that we do enjoy would have to go bye bye as well
11 as a possible decrease in my grocery budget. Forget
12 being able to put money in savings because corporate
13 greed is continuing to kill the middle class American
14 dream.

15 I know that I'm not the only customer who
16 stands to face this reality, and that is why I'm here to
17 testify on behalf of those who couldn't make it for
18 whatever reason to this hearing, those who feel their
19 voice will not be heard and my family and my neighbors.
20 I respectfully ask that the Missouri Public Service
21 Commission deny this obnoxious increase to rate
22 revenues, keep the fuel adjustment clause where it's at,
23 and only approve the residential charge increase of \$3.
24 That to me is more reasonable and will not put that much
25 more financial stress on the majority of us Liberty

1 customers who stand to see our bills increase somewhere
2 between 30 and 40 percent if this goes through.

3 Liberty needs to look within an audit and
4 streamline their financials. They need to be held
5 accountable for any waste and mismanagement of funds.
6 Thank you for your consideration and good night.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Gallion.
8 Appreciate you coming out tonight. Next we have Leon
9 Wirth. They will be followed by Ray Linninger and then
10 Shelly Johnson. Mr. Wirth, let me spell your name and
11 I'll ask you to confirm that spelling. Leon, L-e-o-n,
12 and Wirth is W-i-r-t-h?

13 MR. WIRTH: That is correct.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. Let me set
15 your timer. Please go ahead and give us your comments.

16 MR. WIRTH: All right. Thank you very much
17 for being here this evening. I am here to represent
18 Southwest Baptist University, and I serve as the vice
19 president for advancement here. And I think this is the
20 second time maybe in the last two years that we've
21 hosted a public hearing. And I think you might forgive
22 me if we host one next year maybe we may need to dim the
23 lights or raise the temperature due to the rate
24 increases.

25 SBU has been here for nearly 150 years in

1 Bolivar and we are one of the largest employers in the
2 area. But the first concern I want to express is on
3 behalf of our neighbors for the affordability and
4 quality of life here in Bolivar.

5 A healthy Bolivar helps SBU attract employees
6 and students who live and spend in this community. A
7 healthy SBU is also important for Bolivar. On behalf of
8 SBU, the 30 percent increase, a 30 percent increase
9 would represent for us something pushing nearly \$500,000
10 increased utility costs for that.

11 Now, we have been growing in enrollment in
12 spite of headwinds in other education -- in higher
13 education I should say in part because of the
14 attractiveness of being in this community. But we're
15 also growing because we work very hard to be as
16 affordable as possible, as competitive as possible for
17 our tuition and fees in the higher education landscape.

18 A significant increase of this magnitude would
19 be impossible to simply absorb. We would face the need,
20 the possibility, the probability of having to raise
21 tuition and fees that could wind up imperiling the
22 momentum we have seen in enrollment in recent years
23 which could have a domino effect of imperiling the
24 positive impact that we're able to make on the city and
25 the surrounding communities. So for this and many other

1 reasons that you've already heard from our neighbors and
2 friends, we would urge the Commission to decline this
3 burdensome increase. Thank you very much.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Wirth. I
5 appreciate you being at your office tonight. Ray
6 Linninger. Thank you whoever said that. Then Shelly
7 Johnson and then Ruth Crafton-Barker. Ray Linninger.
8 Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. Shelly Johnson.
9 Ms. Johnson, as you make your way to the microphone,
10 Shelly is spelled S-h-e-l-l-y and Johnson common
11 spelling with an h?

12 MS. JOHNSON: That's correct.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I'll set your
14 timer. Please go ahead and give us your comments.

15 MS. JOHNSON: I would like to say that I am
16 opposed to Liberty receiving any increase. I've been
17 around electric company business for several years. My
18 husband is a retired lineman. He retired from Laclede
19 Electric out of Camdenton. We then at one point was on
20 Southwest Electric. We had great service. It was
21 comparable in the cost.

22 We moved back home to help with our -- once he
23 retired to help with our elderly parents. Our bills are
24 through the roof. Last year I got a bill stating that I
25 had a past-due balance. I called. I got to talk to a

1 pleasant gentleman named Jeremy in Texas that told me
2 the problem was I just needed to pay my bill.

3 When I replied Jeremy, I have paid my bill
4 every month, he informed me if I could come up with
5 proving that I paid the last three months of my bill
6 that they would just take that amount off. I told him
7 I'd do one better, I'd send him six months of which I
8 did.

9 December the 13th I received six bills in the
10 mail. One of them -- Well, they all, they owed me on
11 all of them. \$40.11 up to there's four nineteen all the
12 way up to 2,000 some odd dollars that they owed me back.

13 At this point I got to talk to another lady
14 which asked -- \$2,450.88. I got to talk to a lady that
15 asked me ma'am, is this a residential or commercial
16 account? I said what? She said is it residential or
17 commercial? I said it's residential. It's a house that
18 we just built. She said we've been charging you on a
19 commercial account since you started service with us.

20 I said where does it tell me that on my bill.
21 She said it doesn't. It's a code. So then they proceed
22 to tell me I'm going to have to go and provide so many
23 years proof on our taxes that it is a residential
24 account. I asked who put it in as a commercial account.
25 The gentleman that came out and hooked up our service or

1 was it just a typo in the office? She couldn't tell me.
2 This company is incompetent in my eyes, and I don't
3 think they should receive anything they're asking for.
4 This is ridiculous.

5 I finally gave up. I mean, it goes on.
6 January 2nd and 3rd I got three more bills. The 23rd I
7 got two more bills. They owed me. I owed them. I
8 mean, it's ridiculous.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: Ms. Johnson, if you could
10 finish your thought. Your time has expired.

11 MS. JOHNSON: That's my thought.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. We do have some
13 questions. Mr. Williams.

14 MR. WILLIAMS: I see you have some documents
15 with you. Are those anything you'd want the Commission
16 to see?

17 MS. JOHNSON: You can see them if you want to.
18 I mean, I had to go back and prove what bank we paid
19 each bill out of and our taxes. And I mean, instead of
20 them sending someone out just to.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: Okay. What I'm saying is
22 obviously --

23 MS. JOHNSON: You can view any of this you
24 would like to.

25 MR. WILLIAMS: It's not me. It's a matter of

1 whether you want the Commission to see the documents you
2 have.

3 MS. JOHNSON: Sure.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Let's hold on just a second
5 because I think --

6 MS. JOHNSON: I've got a whole pile of them.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: I think there's a slight
8 miscommunication. Mr. Williams wants you to give me the
9 copies.

10 MS. JOHNSON: You can make copies of them.

11 JUDGE HATCHER: I can make copies, yes. I
12 don't have a photocopier here. If you could talk to her
13 after the hearing and arrange the submission of them or
14 you could email in copies.

15 MS. JOHNSON: That's another thing, the email.

16 MR. WILLIAMS: Actually what I'm starting with
17 is asking whether she wants you to see them. The answer
18 is yes. Then the next issue is how to accomplish that.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay.

20 MR. WILLIAMS: I'm happy to -- I don't know if
21 copies can be made here or not. It's a matter of I
22 don't want to just take your documents if you need them.

23 MS. JOHNSON: Yeah.

24 MR. WILLIAMS: So it would be a matter of how
25 to accomplish getting copies made and submitted to the

1 Commission and you getting your originals back.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: At the end of the hearing --
3 what's the email address? I remember the old one.
4 Exhibits@psc.mo.gov.

5 MR. WILLIAMS: Hang on a moment.

6 MS. JOHNSON: Could you like get with me on
7 that after the hearing?

8 JUDGE HATCHER: I will find you.

9 MR. WILLIAMS: Lphdocuments.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Either one. Lphdocuments or
11 exhibits@psc.mo.gov. I will find you after the hearing
12 and make sure that you have that. Thank you, Ms.
13 Johnson, for being here and bringing your paperwork.
14 Ruth Crafton-Barker. Following her will be Billy
15 Barker. And then Howard Bass.

16 MS. BARKER: First of all, I don't think
17 Liberty Utilities deserves a rate increase because their
18 service sucks. I mean, we lived here just about a
19 little over two years and we have gotten refunds, we
20 have gotten credits, we have gotten overbilling. I
21 can't even go on with the problems that we've had with
22 them.

23 We finally had solar power put on our house.
24 Liberty had to switch it over. They had to come out and
25 switch it from Liberty to the solar, but the solar --

1 Liberty had no record it ever went over to solar. So we
2 were still getting these outrageous utility bills. I
3 think, and this has been almost a year, and about two
4 months ago they finally figured it out. But it's still
5 we get multiple bills a month and there's no competence
6 in your billing department. And I better quit because
7 I'm really, really mad at you guys. So thank you.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Crafton-Barker.
9 I appreciate that. Billy Barker. And for the record
10 before we start, Ruth Crafton-Barker's last name is
11 spelled C-r-a-f-t-o-n-B-a-r-k-e-r, and she's confirming
12 that for me in the audience there. Mr. Barker, please
13 go ahead with your comments. I'll set your timer.

14 MR. BARKER: Okay. What my wife said right
15 there we moved here about two years ago and everything
16 was going pretty good. And our electric bill was about
17 \$400 a month with the sewer and water and everything,
18 which is pretty close to what we was paying at Fulton
19 before we sold up there and bought down here.

20 And everything went along just fine. One
21 month we get a bill for \$807. And we call Liberty. And
22 the girl says well, you used a lot of electricity last
23 month, and so we paid it. Fortunately we could pay it
24 but I know there's a lot of people that couldn't pay a
25 double bill like that. So we paid it.

1 The next month we didn't get a bill. So we
2 called them. They said oh, you won't have a bill this
3 month. You overpaid last month. This is a poor way
4 that they do business. And like she was saying, we put
5 solar on our house. Well, our bill, like I said, is
6 about \$400 a month. That overbilling happened three
7 times in one year. We get it all straightened out. But
8 we put the solar on the house and we still get bills for
9 \$400 a month. And when we call them, they said oh, we
10 don't have any record of you even switching to solar.
11 We had two bills that had our excess electricity bank
12 like they do it. But they didn't have any record.

13 And then we didn't get any bills. No bills.
14 And then all at once we get a bill for over \$2,000 after
15 not having a bill for three or four months. And as them
16 wanting to raise, I don't think they've earned a raise.
17 If you come to work for me and it comes time for you to
18 get a raise and you haven't been doing your job right,
19 guess what. You're not going to get a raise. That's
20 all I've got to say about it.

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Barker. I
22 appreciate you being here. Howard Bass. That will be
23 followed by Harvey Beach and Sharon Bax --

24 MS. BAAS: Baas.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: -- Baas. Thank you. Howard.

1 There you go. Sorry.

2 MR. BASS: Howard Bass. And I live here in
3 Bolivar. I've lived here for the last 15 years. Never
4 had an issue with any of my utility services or
5 whatever, bills, anything, up until this company is
6 bought out what we -- one time the city evidently
7 provided. I don't like to pay for other people's
8 business mistakes. This is income and out-go and you
9 guys are saying you deserve more money. Well, the
10 problem is that they don't know how much money they're
11 making.

12 You can't have the billing problems we've
13 heard about today with them knowing how much money that
14 they've got coming in. And they talk -- They made a bad
15 business decision. That is, they bought this company
16 and assumed that we would pay for all of their
17 improvements right away. They didn't care. They
18 thought -- It was a bad business decision. I don't want
19 to pay for somebody else's bad business decision.
20 They're saying well, we bought this little over a year
21 ago. We've had an increase to water, 30 some percent
22 increase in electricity. They should have figured that
23 into the purchase price. When they bought it from the
24 city, they should have said well, we're going to have to
25 buy all this stuff, we can't pay you as much as you're

1 asking. They were dumb.

2 I don't understand how they can make a kind of
3 mistake where you own a business for a little over a
4 year and, one, you can't even provide a bill for most
5 people and, two, you have to have a 30 percent increase
6 to cover your expenses. They should have figured that
7 in when they bought it. They haven't owned this long
8 enough for this kind of increase.

9 Missouri ranks 50th out of the 50 states in
10 what they pay school teachers. We rank 50th. Do you
11 think that they're going to get a 30 percent pay raise
12 this next year? No. We aren't going to raise our
13 school teachers 30 percent in one year. They just
14 barely can get by. And we've got this company full of,
15 I don't know, what kind of administrators or executives
16 they have but they want -- I don't have a choice who I
17 buy my electricity from. They had a choice about
18 whether or not to buy this company. They decided to buy
19 it. I don't have any choice. But what they did is they
20 made a bad business decision. You don't need to reward
21 anybody's bad business decision. You don't buy a
22 business and then say now we're going to raise your
23 rates 30 percent. You can't do that. I'll hurry up.

24 When I was about 15, I decided I needed a car.
25 So without talking to my dad, I went, had a little

1 money, bought myself an old car. It needed an engine
2 overhaul, it needed a brake job. And so I spent all my
3 money buying it. Went to my dad and I said this old
4 car, I need to get some work done on it. He said you
5 need to go down here to the Assembly of God Church on
6 Wednesday night and they'll give you a pair of tennis
7 shoes. When you get those worn out, come and talk to me
8 about your car because your bad business decision isn't
9 something I should have to pay for. And their bad
10 business decision isn't something I need to pay for. If
11 they don't know the revenue, how can they tell you how
12 much money that they need. They don't know what their
13 revenue is. It's just dumb.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Bass. I
15 appreciate you.

16 MR. BASS: They spend too much money on DEI
17 evidently.

18 JUDGE HATCHER: Mr. Bass, before you go, I
19 need to confirm the spelling of your last name. Is it
20 B-a-s-s?

21 MR. BASS: Just like the fish.

22 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I appreciate
23 you being here tonight. Next name we have Harvey Beach.
24 That will be followed by Sharon Baas. Mr. Beach, your
25 last name is spelled like the destination?

1 MR. BEACH: Yes, sir, B-e-a-c-h.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And let me start
3 the timer and please give us your comments.

4 MR. BEACH: I must be one of the few people
5 here that doesn't have a billing issue with Liberty,
6 which I'm not from Bolivar. I live at Vista, about 30
7 miles north of here. But I'm still on Liberty
8 Utilities. Their rates, I want to strongly encourage
9 the PSC not to approve their rate increase. Their rate,
10 current rate is higher than any of the co-ops in the
11 state. It's higher than about anybody else.

12 I wasn't really planning on coming down here
13 until I got a letter yesterday that talked about the
14 rate increase and showed the percentage of the rate
15 increase. I went back and tried to figure how they got
16 their numbers. It don't work with the way they're
17 billing me.

18 What they say for 1,000 kilowatts or 1,200
19 kilowatts or 1,500 kilowatts I could go back and find
20 bills in those ranges that no. What they're saying is
21 the current rate is about 20 percent short and then
22 they're wanting to add 30 percent to that. They're not
23 figuring the fuel surcharge, the storm cleanup, all of
24 that.

25 I just bought a home. I retired a year ago,

1 unretired now, but evidently I failed at retirement. I
2 sold the farm that was on the co-op. Moved down here.
3 Cut my home size about in half. This home was using
4 more kilowatts. My bill was almost double because of
5 the crazy rate.

6 I fixed everything I could fix, got my
7 kilowatt usage down, which I did, still with their
8 rates. I went back today. I figured the rate here
9 against the rate from the house I just sold to use the
10 same kilowatt hours. The place I left on their current
11 rate is a 25 percent increase. To go to their new rate,
12 it's almost 40 percent more than the co-op I just left.

13 Well, maybe that's just an anomaly. I was
14 sitting at my desk looking out the window at a co-op
15 utility pole. I walked over to a neighbor's house.
16 Said can I look at your utility bills how this co-op
17 bills you? Sure. Pulled them out. I figured theirs.

18 Okay. The co-op that has a pole within sight
19 of my office window, I don't think I'd have to set two
20 poles, I think I could set one and bring power from that
21 co-op. Pretty sure I could do it with one pole. I
22 think it's about -- it's less than 300 yards. It's more
23 like 200. That co-op, the current rate is about twenty,
24 somewhere between 29 and 32 percent for the same
25 kilowatt hour. Go to the new one and it gets to almost

1 40 percent, cheaper than Liberty. How can we be talking
2 about giving them a rate increase when they can't match
3 the rates that other companies are charging.

4 I had a 41-year career in the grain industry.
5 I worked mostly in private industry. I usually competed
6 with the co-op. I found most private entities that I
7 worked for I'm competing with the co-op because we could
8 beat them on price, we could beat them on service. Why
9 is this reversed in utility? Thank you.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Beach. I
11 appreciate you being here tonight. I don't see any
12 questions. I appreciate you being here.

13 MR. BEACH: Thank you.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Sharon Baas and she will be
15 followed by Jeff Miller, Greg Harding and Bob Zumalt.
16 Ms. Baas, I'm going to spell your name and ask you to
17 confirm it. Sharon, S-h-a-r-o-n, Baas, B-a-a-s.

18 MS. BAAS: Correct.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And I'll go ahead
20 and start your timer. Please give us your comments.

21 MS. BAAS: Okay. Well, I am a number
22 cruncher. So I spent the entire day today just about
23 filling in the past five and a half years of the bills
24 just so that I could get a true picture of the cost per
25 kilowatt hour. And in the past five years from 2020 to

1 2024, even though there hasn't officially been a rate
2 increase, my kilowatt hour cost has gone up 19.6
3 percent.

4 And I am assuming that that is because of
5 these other charges that they don't figure into their
6 base rate calculation which they said they do the
7 customer base charge, the usage charges and the off peak
8 rates. Those are the only three factors they are
9 figuring in. But we also have energy efficient
10 investments, energy efficiency program costs, the storm
11 and Asbury correction which is going to go on for 13
12 years, and there's fuel adjustment clauses also.

13 So that adds into the cost that they're not
14 even calculating that rate increase into. And I did
15 comparatives, as the gentleman before me said, of about
16 five different utility companies and Liberty Utilities
17 is the most expensive. I don't understand since they're
18 a public utility how there can be such a large rate
19 difference.

20 And the other thing that I just wanted to say
21 is I looked at inflation rates. And the inflation rate
22 for the past five years has been anywhere between 2.7
23 percent and 4.7 percent with the exception of 2022,
24 which was 8 percent. All of those are lower than 39
25 percent increase. So it just doesn't make sense to me

1 that they can ask for that large of an increase. And
2 that's about it.

3 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Baas. I
4 appreciate that. I don't have any questions for you.
5 Thank you for coming out tonight. Jeff Miller. That's
6 M-i-l-l-e-r; is that correct?

7 MR. MILLER: That's correct.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I'll set your
9 timer. Please go ahead and tell us your comments.

10 MR. MILLER: Okay. Thank you for being here.
11 My name is Jeff Miller. I've lived in this community
12 for, gosh, probably 52 years. So I was born and raised
13 here. And quite honestly, Liberty, I've never really
14 had a lot of issues with them. I've got a lot of
15 friends that work at Liberty. So what I'm about to say
16 is nothing personal. However, given such a huge
17 increase I felt compelled to come and provide testimony.

18 136 million I believe is the number that was
19 brought up. That is a huge profit for anyone. I always
20 try and put myself in other people's shoes. If I owned
21 Liberty and I was making \$136 million a year, there's no
22 way I would be asking to make more. I think that's
23 almost on borderline unethical. And you know, you see
24 people in our community that struggle just to get by.

25 And that is a tremendous difference, you know.

1 I definitely am in free market, believe in capitalism.
2 I own businesses myself. But if I were to try and
3 create even more wealth than what is being created, I
4 just view that as wrong, especially when so many people
5 are struggling to get by.

6 And I own rental properties and I guess I'm
7 also testifying partly on their behalf because they
8 struggle just to get by with the increase in rent and,
9 you know, property taxes and insurance and interest rate
10 for bank loans have gone up. Where does it stop? And
11 by no means am I saying that Liberty should not make a
12 profit. I believe they should make a profit. I think
13 profit is a great thing.

14 You know, I had an old boss who used to say
15 hey, it's good to be a pig. I know that sounds like a
16 crazy analogy. It's good to be a pig. Make all the
17 profit that you can. That is a good thing. But hogs
18 get slaughtered. And you know, that is a real analogy.
19 It's okay to make a profit, but you ask and try and get
20 too much it's going to be the end of you was the message
21 to me. Right. So I do think that's a very appropriate
22 analogy.

23 The other thing that I would say is there
24 surely has to be some process problems within this
25 organization. You know, you listen to all the testimony

1 inefficiencies in billing which leads you to think gosh,
2 there must be tons of inefficiencies in this
3 organization where they can surely make up some of this
4 expense that they're talking about they need to cover.
5 But if they're already making 136 and slated to make 150
6 some million next year with this increase, that seems a
7 little over the top. And so I guess real quick I did
8 want to say that I received a bill for \$13,000. One was
9 for 3,000, which I contacted them. They said oh, that
10 was our error. We are taking that bill away. Which I
11 was like thank you very much, right. But then I
12 received two more bills, one for approximately 2,700,
13 another one for approximately 7,000 for rental
14 properties. And I received it on June 23. Due date on
15 my bill said due on June 4.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Mr. Miller, your time has
17 expired. If you could finish your thought.

18 MR. MILLER: Just real quick. So the fact
19 that I'm getting a bill that was due two weeks before I
20 even received it and then was sent to collections, that
21 is a real sticking point with me because I value my
22 credit and I pay my bills. And to be sent to
23 collections for a bill that I didn't even get is very
24 irritating.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Miller. I

1 appreciate that. Mr. Miller, if you'd come back,
2 please. Mr. Miller, we still have questions for you.
3 That's all right. Mr. Williams.

4 MR. WILLIAMS: I have a question about you
5 said June. Is that June of this year, last year?

6 MR. MILLER: This year, June 23. And
7 yesterday I just got four or five more bills for the
8 same property. To be honest with you, I think what
9 happened is I had tenants in some of these places and
10 they did not have good record keeping and so I think
11 some of the tenants that did not pay, I think they sent
12 me the bill for those individuals because that's why
13 they originally wrote off the first \$3,000 bill.

14 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Miller. I
16 appreciate you being here. Greg Harding. I'll read a
17 few more names as Mr. Harding makes his way. Bob
18 Zumalt, David Peterson, Tionna Spain?

19 MS. SPOHN: Tionna Spohn.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Mr. Harding, let
21 me spell your name and ask you to confirm. That last
22 name is H-a-r-d-i-n-g; is that correct?

23 MR. HARDING: That is correct.

24 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I'll go ahead
25 and set your timer and please give us your comments.

1 MR. HARDING: Don't worry about it. I'm going
2 to take that option given in the beginning. I agree
3 with what has already been said and I have nothing more
4 to add. Thank you.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate your
6 brevity. Thank you for taking the time to come out
7 tonight. Bob Zumalt. Would you spell your last name
8 for the record.

9 MR. ZUMALT: Z-u-m-a-l-t.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I'll go ahead
11 and set your timer. Please give us your comments.

12 MR. ZUMALT: Yeah. Since I've lived here in
13 Missouri, I've been on three different utility
14 companies. This is by far the worst I've ever seen.
15 Okay. I've been on it now for about a year and a half.
16 First year not too bad because I didn't have a house.
17 Then I built a house. Now my wife comes to me every
18 month, I can't make sense of this bill. This says this.
19 This says this. I paid them here. So I mean, so, no,
20 they don't have it straightened out period.

21 I own a home improvement company. I've done
22 it for about 35 years. I wish I could do a 40 percent
23 increase in one year. I wish I could have a monopoly.
24 I'd be rich too. That's the problem. You've got a
25 monopoly. We don't have a choice on who we get our

1 electric from. Any time you do that it's not good to
2 the consumer. Never is.

3 Okay. Until they deregulate like they do in
4 some of the other states where we actually have a
5 choice, your rates aren't going to go down. I've seen
6 it all the time in Springfield. CU. Their city council
7 would approve it. Every time. Didn't matter what the
8 people said. You guys will probably do the same thing
9 here. I'm hoping not. Thank you.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Zumalt. I
11 appreciate that. David Peterson. After Mr. Peterson,
12 Tionna Spohn, Phillip Canole, Victoria Dvorak. I'm
13 positive I mispronounced at least one of those.
14 Mr. Peterson. Your last name is spelled
15 P-e-t-e-r-s-o-n; is that correct?

16 MR. PETERSON: Yeah, that's correct.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Let me set your
18 timer. Please go ahead and give us your comments.

19 MR. PETERSON: I've been a citizen of Bolivar
20 all my life. Been a customer of --

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Could you speak into the
22 microphone a little. Thanks.

23 MR. PETERSON: I've been a customer of Liberty
24 for five years at my current address. My wife and I
25 have a chance to buy our home. We're looking to buy our

1 first home. But we are not going to choose anywhere
2 within Liberty's jurisdiction. That is the defining
3 factor of why we're going to move out of our house now.
4 It's something I hear from my friends and family the
5 same thing. Nobody wants to live where Liberty has
6 power over the electricity.

7 I've been against the 30 percent rate
8 increase. I think if you guys want the money, maybe go
9 to the Algonquin shareholders. They're getting big
10 dividends every single year. Upwards of \$10 million for
11 some shareholders. So I vote you get your 30 percent
12 increase from the shareholders, not us. That's all I
13 have.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. I
15 don't see any questions. I appreciate you coming out
16 tonight. Tionna Spohn. I am at the last three
17 witnesses. As I finish the last witness, I will then
18 ask for anyone in the audience who did not sign up and
19 who would like to testify. Ms. Spohn, would you spell
20 your last name for the record, please?

21 MS. SPOHN: Yeah. It's S-p-o-h-n. I have a
22 very loud voice you guys. I apologize. I'm going to
23 try not to blow your eardrums out. My name is Tionna
24 Spohn and I am a resident of Bolivar, Missouri. I've
25 lived here on and off for 14 years. I'm from around the

1 area before that.

2 We've been blessed to start a family here. I
3 can truly say I love my community. I mean, it's full of
4 hard working people doing their best to, you know, pay
5 their bills and take care of each other really as a
6 community that comes together. I've witnessed it
7 multiple times. But ever since Liberty became our
8 utility provider, doing that has become much more
9 difficult.

10 For over a year, Liberty's billing system has
11 wreaked havoc on my community. I speak on behalf of
12 really all of those experiencing issues. Community
13 members cannot understand their bills or how much they
14 owe. These are extremely stressful situations that do
15 take a toll on any community that is already vulnerable
16 and struggling economically.

17 A lot of their rates have been mentioned. We
18 are already economically at risk at a higher rate than a
19 lot of other towns individually anyways. And so the
20 fact that Liberty is now asking for a rate hike, I mean,
21 it really is an insult when the issues that are at hand
22 have not even been corrected. We've been treated with
23 total disregard for over a year as we've struggled to
24 simply understand our bills or even get our bills for
25 that matter. We're not even receiving them.

1 I've called Liberty customer service many
2 times for help. The process is an absolute nightmare.
3 You get passed back and forth. You guys have heard it.
4 You get disconnected. It results in hours of wasted
5 time with no, no closer answers.

6 You know, the situation here at Liberty is
7 different because this has been ongoing for over a year.
8 We have empty promises after promises with little to no
9 correction. The average Bolivar resident cannot and
10 should not have to stand in the lobby for hours to have
11 a bill corrected or understood. Nor should they have to
12 attend a place like this for hours to have it corrected
13 because this seems to be the only opportunity that many
14 of these members have had to have anything fixed.

15 That should not be the case. That has been
16 our only resolution. You would think that it couldn't
17 get worse than that. One day I will share an experience
18 with I had here at the Liberty lobby as I went in to
19 have some of my own issues figured out because I had a
20 bill over \$1,400 that was for one month. That's about
21 quadruple what it normally would have been. I also had
22 some missing bills prior to that.

23 So when I walked in, it was pretty
24 disheartening that day. Pretty horrible experience. As
25 I walked in, there were about 9 to 12 people. I'd say

1 half of those were senior citizens, two of which had
2 canes. There were four chairs you guys. Four chairs, 9
3 to 12 people at any given point in time. Half of those
4 people really physically could not stand probably for
5 that long. That was very disheartening for me.

6 I was boiling inside. There were no chairs
7 offered. That is a very poor point of customer service.
8 I will just be honest that was really my last straw.
9 And so, you know, as I stood there I spoke with several
10 people in the waiting room about their own issues. I
11 was in there for 45 minutes just to get bills printed
12 out that were also not printed completely.

13 During that time I spoke with a 92-year-old
14 war veteran, and I don't remember the gentleman's name,
15 but he told me that he had survived polio and many wars
16 and never imagined he'd be fighting harder against a
17 utility company just to understand the rates and what
18 they were sending.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Ms. Spohn.

20 MS. SPOHN: I will wrap it up. So Liberty is
21 just draining our community, you know, and when will
22 they be held accountable, where is the balance in this.
23 They think they're entitled to yet another rate hike.
24 When will the customers get a break. I worry that if we
25 don't get a break we will break. I strongly urge the

1 Commission to refuse to grant Liberty's requested rate
2 hike. My community simply cannot afford this. Thank
3 you guys for listening.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Spohn. I
5 appreciate you being here. Phillip Canole.

6 MS. SPOHN: I apologize. I do have documents.
7 Where do we put those at?

8 JUDGE HATCHER: I'll take them. You don't
9 need this copy back? Okay. Thank you. I'll make sure
10 and mark that as an exhibit, attach it to the transcript
11 for this.

12 MR. CANOLE: Hi. It's Canole.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I apologize. The
14 last name is spelled C-a-n-o-l-e?

15 MR. CANOLE: Yes, sir.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Mr. Canole. Thank you. Let
17 me set the timer. Please go ahead and give us your
18 comments.

19 MR. CANOLE: Okay. I looked this up just
20 while we were waiting and I looked up the dividends for
21 last quarter for the company based on 767,830,277 shares
22 in the company at 6.5 cents a share. On July 15 this
23 year the company paid out almost \$49,980,968 in
24 dividends and for the last four quarters the company
25 handed out dividends of \$199 million. Are you going to

1 vote to subsidize their dividends for their shareholders
2 for the last year because, you know, that's a lot of
3 money paying out in dividends. They also anyone can do
4 a Google search. And in '23, they suspended their
5 company's dividend reinvestment plan. That to me seems
6 suspicious. I'm not going to sit here and bore you with
7 oh, my bills. Everyone here has had bills. I didn't
8 get a bill the last two months. They said oh, there was
9 an error in mailing something. Everything takes like
10 ten days to get here. I've had where I had a bill due
11 the day I got it in the mail. I pay my bills.

12 I have rental properties here, and all the
13 renters say the same thing, outrageous bills, you know,
14 they don't want to leave Bolivar but they can't afford
15 these outrageous bills. You know, I understand everyone
16 has got their own personal problems and I'm trying to
17 stick to not emotional issues, you know.

18 People you provide your retirement, you know,
19 your personal responsibilities are your personal
20 responsibility. And I believe in profits for a private
21 company. But when it comes to a public utility, we rely
22 on you guys here, the Service Commission. You're
23 appointed by, what, the Governor, approved by the Senate
24 for six-year terms and you guys can be removed as well.

25 I want you to do the right thing and look

1 deeper into this company and how they spend their money
2 and maybe look into the increases they're asking in
3 other states, not just Missouri, because I think you'd
4 be surprised what you find. That's all I have to say.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Canole. I
6 appreciate you being here tonight.

7 MR. CANOLE: Thanks.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Victoria Dvorak. And the last
9 name I have spelled D-v-e-r-a-k; is that correct?

10 MS. DVORAK: No. It's D as in dog -- here,
11 let me get this down here. Okay. It is D-v-o-r-a-k,
12 Dvorak. My husband is Czech.

13 Thank you very much for being here. I know
14 this is really late. I have not had supper myself and
15 I'm kind of hungry now. So to dovetail right into this,
16 I'm also one of those who've had all of these billing
17 errors. There's no sense in covering that again other
18 than to say that I understand that Liberty put in SAP.
19 They changed their system to SAP, which is a German
20 software company. SAP is a very, very great software
21 program. It is very hard to learn and it's very hard to
22 implement.

23 I worked for a company, a number four building
24 industry in the United States. And when we implemented
25 SAP, it took two years to implement it and it took

1 another year to train everyone. And unfortunately or
2 fortunately, I don't know, I became a power user. That
3 meant I had to go and help everybody else who could not
4 function in the SAP world. Okay. She's shaking her
5 head.

6 So what I want to say is I think that the
7 customer service reps at Liberty need training, training
8 training, training, and this is never going to get
9 better until they get training. I have spent hours on
10 the phone with the customer service reps and had the
11 same issues that have already been talked about. Okay.

12 Now, let me tell you really why I'm here. I
13 have a 102-year-old aunt who lives here in Bolivar. And
14 I can tell you she's on a fixed income and if you raise
15 this rate, I mean, especially at the numbers you're
16 talking about, we will have to move her. I mean, we
17 will have to move her to the country because Southwest
18 Co-op doesn't charge near what you do or what Liberty
19 does.

20 So I've already had friends and people at
21 church who have moved to Fair Play because they don't
22 have to deal with Liberty and you're going to see that
23 more and more and more. People are going to be exiting
24 out of here at unfortunately there's so many elderly
25 people here and some of them don't have family to help

1 them.

2 We moved my aunt from Texas to help her. I
3 mean, you know, I don't know whether she's going to live
4 one more year or ten more years. Her doctor says she
5 can live ten more years. I don't know whether I will
6 make it ten more years. But if she does, great. But I
7 know that she cannot afford this kind of an increase.
8 You know, these little people here, the majority of the
9 people here are elderly. You can walk around in
10 Walmart. You can walk around wherever and see. I mean,
11 they're elderly people.

12 I also need to tell you that I am the
13 treasurer of an HOA here that is nothing but senior
14 citizens 55 and over. These people are on fixed
15 incomes. I mean, we just had to raise our dues
16 significantly just because of the Liberty increase on
17 the water. And before I came here tonight I was late 30
18 minutes getting here because I was working on the
19 numbers for our meeting tomorrow with the dues increase
20 that we had to set forth to try and figure out how much
21 do I put in the line item for Liberty Utility for the
22 total bill. Now, that's just on the water.

23 The electric is a whole different thing, of
24 course, and that's why we're here tonight. I can tell
25 you that my little aunt, she wears sweat pants. She

1 wears two or three layers so that she does not have to
2 use the electricity.

3 And we've changed her thermostat three times
4 so that I have it where I can control her temperature.
5 But bless her heart, she freezes to death. And so she
6 has to wear at least three layers in order to just even
7 function. Okay. Is my time up? Okay. Thank you very,
8 very much. I can tell this gentleman over here that the
9 last two bills that I have received have been I think
10 correct, I think correct. I've received bills anywhere
11 from 800 to \$2,400, yeah, but I think the last two bills
12 for June and July are correct. So hopefully there's
13 been some improvement. Thank you very much.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Dvorak. I
15 appreciate you being here. That is the end of our
16 witness list. As promised, I will offer anyone in the
17 audience who has not testified yet who didn't sign up on
18 the list but would like to come and say a few words. Is
19 there anyone who would like to come down and give their
20 thoughts to the Commission? Yes, come on down. Did you
21 testify already?

22 MR. JOHNSON: I did not.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay. Please tell me your
24 name.

25 MR. JOHNSON: My name is David Johnson.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: And Mr. Johnson, can you spell
2 your last name for our court reporter, please?

3 MR. JOHNSON: J-o-h-n-s-o-n.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead
5 and give us your comments. I'll start your timer.

6 MR. JOHNSON: I'm not going to go into the
7 whole bill issue. That really is not why I want to
8 talk. I think the Commission is being misled very
9 heavily by the people from Liberty. I'm a retired
10 lineman. I know what it takes to keep the lines going.
11 I've worked multiple storm breaks. I've worked ice
12 storms, tornados. They're lying to you on what they're
13 spending on these substations.

14 I actually tried to get the guy nailed down
15 earlier on how many substations that they had rebuilt.
16 He couldn't give me a number. But they've been in 22 of
17 them. That is routine maintenance. That's not an added
18 cost. That is routine maintenance that they're doing.
19 So I just think and I asked some of the other people
20 over here earlier if they do checks and balances on what
21 Liberty says that they're doing with the money they
22 spend. And I couldn't get a direct answer on that
23 either. So I'm just saying I think you're being misled.

24 I know that working for the co-op that I
25 worked for and all the co-ops in Missouri you get a

1 rebate check from them for money that they have leftover
2 that they did not spend. They're wanting another 30, 40
3 percent on top of our bills when they made \$700 million.

4 So I don't know what you all's faith
5 background is. I pray to God that you'll do your job
6 for us, the public.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Johnson. I
8 appreciate you being here. Are there any other members
9 of the audience who didn't get a chance to speak?

10 All right. Thank you all. We will go ahead
11 and bring our hearing to a conclusion. Commissioner
12 Mitchell, would you like to say some closing remarks,
13 please?

14 COMMISSIONER MITCHELL: Sure. Thank you,
15 Judge, and thank you for being here this evening. We
16 appreciate your presence and sticking with it for so
17 long to tell us what your thoughts were. We got a lot
18 of important information from you, and I want to assure
19 you that we'll take that information seriously and take
20 it to heart as we move through this process. If you
21 have friends or neighbors that didn't get a chance to
22 come tonight, we want you to know that there are more
23 public hearings in Aurora and down in Branson and there
24 will also be two public hearings that are available
25 online. So if you'd spread the word to your friends and

1 neighbors if they're interested in attending those, it
2 would be great to have you at those. So thank you again
3 for being here. We really do appreciate it.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you all. It is getting
5 rather late. I have paperwork and, Ms. Johnson, I will
6 come find you in just a moment. Let's go ahead and
7 adjourn the hearing and go off the record. Thank you
8 everyone. Please have a safe drive home.

9 (WHEREUPON, the proceedings concluded at 8:56
10 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF MISSOURI)

COUNTY OF COLE)

I, Beverly Jean Bentch, RPR, CCR No. 640, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the foregoing Public Service Local Public Hearing and that the transcript, pages 1 through 67, is a true record of my stenographic notes.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative, employee, attorney, or counsel of any of the parties, nor am I a relative or counsel connected with the action, nor am I financially interested in the action.

Dated this 4th day of August, 2025.

Beverly Jean Bentch

Beverly Jean Bentch, RPR, CCR No. 640

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