

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)

THURSDAY, JULY 24, 2025
6:00 p.m. - 9:12 p.m.

Recreation Center
126 West Hadley Street
Aurora, MO 65605

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CHARLES HATCHER, Presiding
SENIOR REGULATORY LAW JUDGE

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

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

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25

1 The following proceedings began at 7:35 p.m.:

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Let's go ahead and go on the
3 record. Today is July 24, 2025. The current time is
4 7:35 p.m. The question and answer portion of tonight's
5 event has just concluded. I do hope that everyone was
6 able to get all of their questions answered. The reason
7 I bring that up is because the Commissioners and myself
8 will not be able to answer any questions this evening.

9 This portion of the hearing is to hear what
10 your comments are. The Commissioners need to remain
11 impartial until after this case is concluded and we have
12 the evidentiary hearing. The Public Service Commission
13 has set this time for a local public hearing to give
14 members of the public a chance to comment about
15 Liberty's request for a rate increase.

16 This is Case No. ER-2024-0261. The Commission
17 is made up of five Commissioners. There is one vacancy
18 at the moment. So we have four currently serving
19 Commissioners. The Commission's Chair is Kayla Hahn,
20 and the other Commissioners are Commissioner Maida
21 Coleman, Commissioner Glen Kolkmeyer and Commissioner
22 John Mitchell.

23 My name is Charles Hatcher, and I am the
24 Regulatory Law Judge that will be overseeing this
25 hearing. The Commission regulates the rates charged by

1 public utility companies in Missouri to ensure that
2 those rates are just and reasonable. The Commission
3 also regulates the safety and quality of the operations
4 of those public utilities.

5 With me today is Commissioner Glen Kolkmeyer.
6 The other three Commissioners are also in attendance but
7 they are on the phone listening in. Commissioner
8 Kolkmeyer, would you like to make any opening remarks?

9 COMMISSIONER KOLKMEYER: Yes. Thank you,
10 Judge. Good evening. I want to thank everyone for
11 coming out this evening. On behalf of Chair Hahn and
12 the other Commissioners, I want to welcome you here this
13 evening. This is a very important part of this
14 procedure. We have not made any decisions in this case
15 because we haven't heard any evidence in this case.

16 This process starts with you, the ratepayers
17 and the customers of the company. So we're here to hear
18 from you. You say why am I the only one here, don't the
19 others care. Well, I'm from this side of the state and
20 I cover the public hearings that are in this region. We
21 have Commissioners from all over the state. So they
22 cover the hearings in their region. So the others are
23 online. So we're here to hear what you have to say. We
24 welcome your comments. Thank you, Judge.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Commissioner.

1 We'll go ahead and ask the parties to introduce
2 themselves. First counsel for Liberty.

3 MS. CARTER: Diana Carter for the Empire
4 District Electric Company doing business as Liberty.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Next counsel for
6 the Staff of the Commission.

7 MS. JOHNSON: Tracy Johnson from Staff
8 Counsel's Office representing the Staff of the Public
9 Service Commission.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And for the Office
11 of the Public Counsel.

12 MR. WILLIAMS: Nathan Williams, Chief Deputy
13 Public Counsel, appearing on behalf of the public and
14 the Office of the Public Counsel.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And we have had a
16 few intervening parties in this case. Are any of those
17 parties here and would like to introduce themselves on
18 the record? Seeing none. We'll go ahead and move on.

19 This is a fairly well attended hearing, and we
20 want to make sure that we hear from everyone that has
21 come to provide their comments. For that reason, we
22 will be limiting comments to three minutes per person.
23 We do that so that we can make sure that we have time to
24 hear what your comments are, as well as hear the
25 comments of all of your neighbors who have come out to

1 talk to the Commissioners as well.

2 How that will work is I have a timer. I'll
3 just set that. When the timer buzzes, that means your
4 three minutes are up and I will let you know that your
5 time has expired and ask you to go ahead and finish your
6 thought. I would ask that everyone please be polite and
7 respect everyone else's right to speak. We are trying
8 to save some time with the hearing on the administrative
9 side so that we can spend more time listening to all the
10 customers. So for that reason what I'm going to do
11 first is I have a list of the 25 or so of you who have
12 signed up to testify. And I'm going to swear you all in
13 now as a group before you testify.

14 We have found that when I swear in
15 individuals, it takes an extra almost minute per
16 individual to testify. That will quickly get us here
17 staying very late way past my bedtime. So for all of
18 those persons who have signed up to testify, please
19 raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear or affirm
20 that the testimony you're about to give will be the
21 truth. Please say I do if that is true.

22 Thank you. I will ask you to come up to the
23 microphone to give your comments. I'll ask you to spell
24 your last name for the court reporter and then I will
25 confirm that you had raised your hands and stated that

1 you would testify under oath. Then I'll ask you to give
2 your comments. With that, let's go ahead and begin.
3 The first name I have on my list is David McCann.
4 First, you signed up first at the end of the last
5 hearing. Mr. McCann, would you please spell your last
6 name.

7 MR. McCANN: Dave McCann, M-c-C-a-n-n. And I
8 swore that I would tell the truth.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. Please go
10 ahead with your comments.

11 MR. McCANN: Okay. Mercy. You have already
12 heard from a lot of Liberty customers during the past
13 few weeks several reasons why Liberty should not receive
14 a rate increase running from billing problems,
15 overcharging, estimating the meter usage while the
16 electric has been shut off completely for almost two
17 weeks. Not taking time for mail being delivered by the
18 post office service takes seven days to deliver mail and
19 we get our bill. By the time we send it back in, it
20 takes seven more days. That's 14 days that they say it
21 takes to deliver a piece of mail. By the time you get
22 it, Liberty gets it, it takes time to post it, we're
23 already overdue and being charged late charges.

24 So I'd like to see us take and have a system
25 set up for a large usage increase and problem being

1 because of problems of broken lines and things like
2 that. People has been stating that they've got billed
3 for \$15,000 in one month. And there's nobody contacting
4 them saying you're using so much water or electricity
5 and we don't know why, we need to check it out. We had
6 the service like that with Empire when they were in
7 business. They would call us up, say are you using an
8 excessive amount of utilities. We start looking for
9 problems.

10 Now with all of this above problems, Liberty
11 is asking for a rate increase which will raise an
12 average bill of citizens over \$60 a month above their
13 regular cost. I would like to see that the Public
14 Service Commission to vote down the payment request for
15 increasing the production of power and adding on new
16 customers in new areas within the state before they
17 correct these problems. And I'd like to see a committee
18 or something set up that will oversee each one of these
19 problems being brought up at these meetings with
20 Liberty.

21 I'd like to see somebody set up a committee to
22 oversee that each one of these problems are addressed
23 before we take and increase their payments and charges.
24 I don't believe that -- One of the other things is
25 making payments locally. I understand it costs a lot of

1 money to open a shop, but yet whenever it comes down to
2 brass tacks it's easier for me to make a payment locally
3 than it is to mail it off and wait 14 days to get the
4 thing done. So we figure out what to do. We do have an
5 area set up in Walmart so that you can pay, but they
6 only take cash and debit cards. I don't have a debit
7 card and I don't pay cash, because I have to have paper
8 trail. So if they can't take a credit card, then they
9 can take my check. Walmart will not take a check. So
10 customer service has went down the tubes. They're
11 making it easy for people to make their payments. So if
12 they're going to set up these shops to collect money
13 from us, then give them the ability to accept a check
14 and not have to take and put it all in one pool and
15 Walmart writes a check and pay the bill and if it's hot,
16 Walmart gets hold of the problem.

17 We need a system set up that they can pay by
18 check or credit card, whichever, and be able to take and
19 run it through the system without any problem.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: Mr. McCann, your time is
21 expired. Can you finish your thought?

22 MR. McCANN: Again, I'd like to suggest that
23 the committee take this under advisement and vote down
24 the increase. Thank you.

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

1 appreciate you being here. Next witness we have is Ed
2 Whitty. And let me go ahead and call some of the other
3 names in line. Regina Payne and Jim Randels. If you
4 have not signed up to testify, after I get done calling
5 the names of those who have signed up then I'll open
6 this up to the audience. Ed Whitty. Okay. Thank you.
7 Regina Payne. Ms. Payne, if you would please spell your
8 last name for our court reporter.

9 MS. PAYNE: P-a-y-n-e.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Just to confirm,
11 you did state that you would be testifying under oath?

12 MS. PAYNE: Uh-huh.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead
14 with your comments.

15 MS. PAYNE: I fall in the category for the
16 highest rate increase because I try to conserve the
17 energy, and I would say probably most people that are
18 retired and on social security are going to fall in that
19 rate. And they don't get a social security rate of that
20 and I don't think that that's really fair that somebody
21 that uses less electricity gets the highest rate
22 increase. It's almost 40 percent. And that's just
23 unreasonable totally.

24 And I know that part of this money that they
25 want is to pay for things that they have done such as

1 the new building that they built which they really
2 didn't need at all. The building they had worked just
3 fine, and nobody had a say in that. They want us to pay
4 for it, but we didn't have a say in them building it.

5 Also, the building that they had, the people
6 that needed to pay their bill could do that there. And
7 this building they can't even utilize it at all. So I
8 just think that what they're asking for is totally
9 unreasonable. Thank you.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Payne. I
11 appreciate you being here this evening. Next I have Jim
12 Randels. Thank you, sir. Mr. Randels, if you would
13 spell your name for our court reporter, please.

14 MR. RANDELS: Randels, R-a-n-d-e-l-s.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I apologize for
16 the mispronunciation and I shall warn everyone that
17 might happen several more times. I do apologize.

18 MR. RANDELS: If that's the worst thing that
19 happens to us, we'll be okay.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you for your
21 understanding, sir. Please go ahead with your comment.

22 MR. RANDELS: As a 40-year customer of Empire
23 and now Liberty, I saw a definite change when the
24 takeover took place in the customer service side and
25 they've had issues that I've had to take to the Public

1 Service Commission to get solved. Citizens should be
2 able to communicate with a local business if it is local
3 and be able to get their problems taken care of.

4 All of this has led to a lack of confidence in
5 the management of Liberty by I think literally all of
6 the users that we've heard from. Everybody has some
7 kind of a customer service problem. And then the issue
8 with the investigation that's been going on and the
9 issue with the fact that they're making such a large
10 request for an increase makes me wonder if they knew
11 what they were buying when they bought Empire and why is
12 it that we need all of this done and spent now and the
13 consumer has to pay for it.

14 I can understand a small increase and I would
15 have no problem with a small rate increase; but like any
16 other senior citizen living on a fixed income and as the
17 lady had mentioned, the proposed rate structure hits the
18 lowest consumer the hardest. I would think that if
19 there was a necessary big increase that that should go
20 to the larger consumers, the businesses and commercial
21 aspects that use electricity where they have an option
22 of being able to pass that on to their customers. As a
23 residential individual, you have no option. It's either
24 pay it or do without. Thank you for your time.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I appreciate

1 you being here tonight. The next name I have is Nikki
2 Coker. To give a heads up to the following persons,
3 this will be Kay Pilkenton, Joyce Deerwester and Larry
4 Forehand. Ms. Coker, would you please spell your last
5 name for our court reporter?

6 MS. COKER: Good evening. I'm Nikki Coker,
7 C-o-k-e-r.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, ma'am.

9 MS. COKER: Thank you.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Please go ahead.

11 MS. COKER: And I just wanted to say that on
12 the website the 2022 rate increase it promised things
13 from savings for the individuals for people from a 277
14 wind turbines on three wind farms. I haven't seen any
15 savings from that. I don't know if anybody else has.
16 Instead we're getting a 30 percent increase. They do
17 offer programs to help those that need -- that can't
18 afford their bills and they need a little help. They
19 offer programs for that. That's kind of like they raise
20 it so high and then they offer you help to pay it.
21 Their shareholders are the ones that offer this.

22 Shareholders are paid by the dividends which
23 are paid by the profits which I pay for. So in other
24 words, I'm paying for that as well. There's one lady
25 made a comment about a 5 percent increase would hurt

1 just as bad as a 30 percent increase. The difference is
2 a 5 percent increase other people could help those
3 people. 30 percent increase, everybody is going to need
4 help. That's all I've got. Thank you.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Coker. I
6 appreciate you coming out tonight. Kay Pilkenton. Not
7 a problem. Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate you being
8 here. Joyce Deerwester.

9 MS. DEERWESTER: I'm Joyce Deerwester. I've
10 only lived here nearly ten years. My last name
11 D-e-e-r-w-e-s-t-e-r.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, ma'am.

13 MS. DEERWESTER: Well, I live on social
14 security. So does my husband. But our bills are
15 tripled. I don't understand. And I know there's a lot
16 more people that are a lot less financially than we are,
17 and I do not know how they're going to make it. The
18 only thing I see out of this is the people that's in the
19 higher level of financial things they're going to be
20 climbing higher and higher when the rest of us are going
21 to go lower and lower in our financial situation.

22 Our houses are not going to get painted or
23 repaired or anything else. This is a poor community
24 comparing it to Republic, Nixa and all of that. I don't
25 know why this poor community has raised it 30 percent.

1 I have friends in Springfield and I compared my bills to
2 theirs. And mine is much higher than theirs and they
3 live in a much more upbeat community.

4 My sister lives in a town. I said Patsy,
5 what's your bills. She told me every one of them. I
6 said look at mine. She said I can't believe you're
7 paying that. And they live -- I don't understand why
8 this community as poor as it is, it doesn't take a
9 rocket scientist to see this isn't a wealthy community.
10 I mean, there's a few wealthy people in here have a lot
11 of money, but the majority if you look around, ride
12 around, you can tell. And go to Walmart. You can tell
13 there's people here that's very poor and they can't
14 hardly make it. It's going to get a lot poorer with
15 those kind of rates. Their houses are going to get a
16 lot trashier looking and everything -- you know what.
17 I'm almost considered being an Amish person, won't have
18 to pay that utility. I do not run a car wash. My bill,
19 my water bill shouldn't be \$155 for one month. I'm
20 going what happened here. Last year for nearly a whole
21 year I kept calling the company and it was hard to get
22 ahold of them. I called them and called them and they'd
23 always say well, there's a glitch in the meter. It's
24 not the computer and your meter is not working well. It
25 took them a long, long time to try to figure it out.

1 The whole time was paying this really high bill.
2 Finally they said well, you can add \$30 a month to your
3 bill to make up for this big high bill you got. And
4 they kept telling me about the glitch.

5 Well, for two months the bill was kind of
6 normal, more normal than usual, and then the third and
7 fourth month it raised way up there again. In December,
8 can you believe it, they said I used 121 or some odd
9 dollars of water. I don't use that kind of water.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Ma'am, I know that Liberty
11 offers several utilities. This one is about the rate
12 increase for their electric.

13 MS. DEERWESTER: This is what?

14 JUDGE HATCHER: This hearing is about the
15 requested rate increase for Empire Electric District.

16 MS. DEERWESTER: Well, both these bills are on
17 the same bill, electric and water on the same page. And
18 I don't know why that is, because a few other bills just
19 had, you know, two different bills, electric and water.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay.

21 MS. DEERWESTER: But what's going on here? I
22 feel like we're in the movie of Robin Hood except it's
23 not taxes. It's in utilities. Seems like only the
24 wealthy is going to get better and the people that's
25 already living from paycheck to paycheck struggling is

1 going to get more poorer. That's all I've got to say.
2 I don't mean to be rude or anything, but I don't like
3 being poor and I certainly don't want to get poorer.
4 I'm considering moving from this community. I'm going
5 to consider moving. I'm looking at other people.
6 They're not having to pay like this and they live in
7 better communities. Go figure.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Deerwester. I
9 appreciate you being here tonight. Larry Forehand. The
10 next few names I have are going to be Teresa Pettit, Max
11 Myers and Ben Plunk. Mr. Forehand, would you please
12 spell your last name for our court reporter?

13 MR. FOREHAND: Sure. F-o-r-e-h-a-n-d.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. Please go
15 ahead with your comment.

16 MR. FOREHAND: The lady that was here before
17 very, very eloquently talked about Liberty's legal and
18 ethical responsibilities to maintain an ongoing company
19 and be ready for reserves and that sort of thing when it
20 happened. Very good. A quick search of the internet
21 told me that there are 121 separate utilities in the
22 state of Missouri. If you rank their rates from 1 to
23 121, Liberty is currently 95. Are those other 121
24 companies, are they shirking their responsibilities? If
25 they're not, at some point in time you might come to the

1 conclusion that maybe Liberty is not being run and
2 managed as well as the others. If you search around for
3 average rates in the state, a common figure you're going
4 to come up with is 10.17 cents per kilowatt hour.

5 At my house last month my electricity, now I'm
6 going to add in the cost of the Asbury decommissioning,
7 because the customers are paying for that and I'm going
8 to add in the cost of the storm damage that the
9 customers are paying for. It's not part of the rate,
10 but it has to be in the check when you write it.

11 At my house, the rate last month based on the
12 kilowatt usage I had was 15.2 cents kilowatt hour. So
13 at some point don't you have to look at how efficiently
14 a company is being managed.

15 And my final comment is to the Public Service
16 Commission I wasn't able to find, and you guys know and
17 it doesn't really matter, but do you ever just tell a
18 company no? The reason I say that, most of us have
19 raised children. And it took my son a pretty quick time
20 to know if he wanted 50 bucks, he would ask me for 100,
21 but his mother would say no, but I can probably get you
22 50. Well, if that's the way the Public Service
23 Commission operates, I'm pretty sure the people at
24 Liberty have figured that out. That's it.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I do

1 appreciate the comments. The next name we have is
2 Teresa Pettit or Pettit.

3 MS. PETTIT: My name is Teresa Pettit,
4 P-e-t-t-i-t. I understand with businesses just like the
5 cost of living need an increase. Everything is getting
6 more expensive. You know, it seems like there's some
7 common sense about maybe COLA. You know, the COLA for
8 social security this year was 2.5 percent.

9 I mean, that's a huge range between that and
10 30 and 39 percent. There needs to be some reasonable
11 determination on that. I spoke earlier that you did not
12 hear but our community is a poor community. And I'm
13 sure you're aware what free and reduced lunches are.
14 And I just talked to the central office today shortly
15 before coming, and the free and reduced lunch rate with
16 the poverty level in our school district is 65 percent
17 which enables all students preschool through 12th grade
18 they now are going to be getting this next school year
19 free breakfast and lunch. That leads me to believe if
20 our district students are having such a hard time being
21 fed, what are their parents, you know, a lot of people
22 work two jobs just to make ends meet right now. They're
23 going to have to make decisions about changing where
24 they move or senior citizens deciding which medication
25 to fill for that month.

1 We're a very poor community and that really
2 needs to be taken into consideration. I'm just
3 re-echoing previous comments of poor customer service.
4 You know, we need to have that local office here. Their
5 billing issues, that's been said before from a previous
6 meeting in June. I'm sure you have that information, is
7 that correct, from the June meeting?

8 JUDGE HATCHER: I'm sorry. I have to pause
9 because we're not really prepared to answer questions
10 and that's a different case.

11 MS. PETTIT: That's okay. I understand that.
12 Okay. I understand. But it's where you're almost
13 losing faith in a company that, you know, they go from,
14 you know, all the way up in their rates it seems like
15 they're not for you like if you want to pay a bill or if
16 you have a problem with a bill.

17 And I know again this isn't a billing issue
18 but we were on vacation one week and we came home and I
19 had 18 bills from Liberty and they weren't all the same.
20 It's crazy. I have a co-worker that has a business here
21 in town and they were struggling as a small business
22 owner keeping things going, because it's a fairly new
23 business. So they drained their pipes, shut everything
24 off and for that time period their bill was still \$600.
25 \$600.

1 And so you really wonder about the trust I
2 guess of the company. Anyway, I want to reiterate I
3 want to applaud Dr. Forehand who was right before me
4 about his comments on the rates as well. He said that
5 very well. And I guess that's it. Thank you for your
6 time.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: If you would stay there for
8 just a second, I do have a follow up question. Do you
9 know what month and year approximately that you received
10 the 18 bills?

11 MS. PETTIT: In the month of April.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: '25?

13 MS. PETTIT: Yes.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Did you call the company to
15 let them know about the billing concern?

16 MS. PETTIT: Yes, I did.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: What was the resolution?

18 MS. PETTIT: It didn't go well. There was no
19 resolution. They said they've got billing problems and
20 you'll get another bill. So anyway. So it's where you
21 lose faith in a company because we were so spoiled with
22 Empire before and now we have this company comes in and
23 it's like you just don't have any faith in them.

24 JUDGE HATCHER: That was in April of '25. Do
25 you still have an outstanding balance from those 18

1 bills?

2 MS. PETTIT: No, I do not. Unfortunately I'm
3 auto pay. So you know what that means. So --

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Did you get your concerns
5 straightened out?

6 MS. PETTIT: No, I did not.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: So as of July 24th, 2025, you
8 still have an outstanding billing concern tied to these
9 18 bills from April of 2025?

10 MS. PETTIT: I hate to say this. I don't mean
11 to be silly about it. But life just gets really busy
12 and it's where you try and you try and it's kind of like
13 you've just got to step forward and start moving -- step
14 backwards and move forward of trying to keep up with it
15 going forward. Anyway.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate you
17 being here tonight. Max Myers. After Mr. Myers, we'll
18 have Ben Plunk, Cathy Langford, Brie Shelton and Daniel
19 Hamill. Mr. Myers, thank you. Would you please spell
20 your name for our court reporter, your last name?

21 MR. MYERS: M-y-e-r-s.

22 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And I haven't been
23 asking, but I just want to confirm you did state that
24 you'd be testifying under oath?

25 MR. MYERS: What was that?

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Earlier when I swore everyone
2 in.

3 MR. MYERS: Yes, I did.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. Please go
5 ahead with your comments.

6 MR. MYERS: I got a worksheet in the mail
7 explaining what I should see on my bill whenever this
8 rate goes through. It said that the first 500 kilowatts
9 cost \$80.39. The next 1,000 costs 144. This adds up to
10 \$228.16, not 200, which is what they said it would be.
11 This kind of goes to the trust issue. There's an error
12 of 14 percent on their base calculation when they were
13 explaining this. And then when you add in the energy
14 efficiency investment, efficiency program, storm Asbury
15 cost, fuel adjustments clause, off-peak credit. All
16 together my bill is 264.73 on 1,566 kilowatts.

17 Not to get too far into the weeds on this but
18 their estimate of \$200 would be a current bill to me of
19 \$333.23. It's 66 percent increase over their estimate
20 of \$200.

21 Another concern is that when they're adding in
22 the maintenance cost in their new rate request, those
23 should have been figured into the rate that's already
24 there. This should not need to roll into a new rate
25 increase. Maybe an increase but not all the maintenance

1 that they did. The customer service is poor. The
2 witness complaints from many of the customers. Now
3 there's a big rush to improve customer service at an
4 increased cost.

5 It all worked just fine before Liberty took
6 over. New construction projects need extended time
7 frames to get Liberty to hook them up. Closing the
8 Asbury plant before the costs are recovered on the
9 equipment installed to reduce precipitous 99 percent of
10 which are contained from the coal fired plant. Then
11 charging the customers to tear the plant down before the
12 costs were recovered. So we paid for them twice. We
13 paid for them in the rate increase to have the
14 precipitous taken out and now we're paying because they
15 tore it down which is just ridiculous. And I just -- I
16 still don't quite understand why they had to file two
17 rate increases. 92 million was the original request.
18 Then they withdrew that and filed one for 152.8 million,
19 which that's just more of the same. They don't know
20 what they're doing.

21 They spend billions of dollars on wind
22 generating capacity which won't work during ice storms
23 which would be a peak demand period or in mild or
24 excessive wind events and then data, of course, is not
25 made available to check on the operational costs, but

1 it's generally known that wind is the most expensive
2 generation that you can do for electricity. So I just
3 -- I think we need to get some new management in here.
4 I think maybe they ought to have a 10 percent cut
5 instead of a 30 percent increase and maybe they'll go
6 home. Thank you.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Myers. I
8 appreciate you being here tonight. The next name I have
9 on the list is Ben Plunk. After Mr. Plunk will be Cathy
10 Langford, Brie Shelton and Daniel Hamill. Thank you,
11 Mr. Plunk. If you would please spell your last name for
12 our court reporter.

13 MR. PLUNK: Yeah, the same sound a rock makes
14 when it hits water, P-l-u-n-k.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you.

16 MR. PLUNK: I'm the rich guy from Republic.
17 I am a Liberty customer. Given them credit when the
18 storm drove through we were without power three hours.
19 Much shorter time than my coworkers and counterparts in
20 Springfield were without power on City Utilities.

21 But I take issue with a few things. I'm a
22 design engineer. I deal with facts and figures every
23 day for nine hours a day. And earlier Ms. Emery made a
24 statement that 5 percent rate increase could be just as
25 detrimental as a 30 or 40 percent.

1 Let me break that down. And I'm nervous so.
2 Please accept my apologies for that. If I buy a set of
3 four tires for 500 bucks, 5 percent increase is \$25. A
4 30 percent increase adds 150. One I'm a little more
5 able to absorb than the other. So I vehemently disagree
6 with that statement that it can be just as disruptive.
7 It's not even in the same ballpark. We're talking
8 Springfield Cardinals and St. Louis Cardinals. It's not
9 the same game.

10 Secondly, I'd like to point out is one of the
11 publications said that the investors expect a return of
12 investment of 10 percent. My 401k averages 6. If I
13 made a 10 percent ROE, and I don't know a lot about
14 investing, but I know 10 percent is pretty healthy, I
15 wouldn't have had to drop \$12,500 on a new AC system to
16 get my house ready for retirement here in five years
17 which begs the question if I'm investing all this money
18 in LED lights and energy efficient appliances, why do my
19 electric bills continue to rise.

20 I work with a computer and I work with
21 software. We've heard a lot about billing issues, and
22 my job, the computer can spit something out but I have
23 to have the knowledge to know whether or not that
24 information it's giving me is correct.

25 We're hearing a lot of comments about billing

1 issues. I don't think the people at Liberty are using
2 the intelligence. I think they're listening to software
3 and not asking the questions that need to be asked.

4 It's being a disservice to every customer in this room.

5 I don't think a 30 or 40 percent increase on
6 the people that can least afford it is reasonable. I
7 think it's criminal. And I think if I had my way, I'd
8 fire them and deal with somebody else. I can pick my
9 phone service. I can pick my trash service in Republic.
10 I can pick my insurance for my car. But I can't pick my
11 electric company. If I could shop around for another
12 company, that fix is kind of asinine request for a rate
13 increase. This is predatory and the Commission
14 shouldn't allow it. The Commission's job is to protect
15 the taxpayers against these predatory increases. And
16 that's what they need to do now. Thank you.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Plunk. I
18 appreciate that. I appreciate the sentiment but if we
19 could hold that down, we do want to try and give
20 everyone an equal chance to speak. Ms. Langford.

21 MS. SHELTON: She's declined. I'm Brie
22 Shelton.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Ms. Shelton, if you would
24 please spell your last name for our court reporter.

25 MS. SHELTON: S-h-e-l-t-o-n.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And to confirm,
2 you did state that you'd be testifying under oath
3 earlier?

4 MS. SHELTON: Yes.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

6 MS. SHELTON: My understanding is that prices
7 do increase. We however do object to the exorbitant
8 amount of a 30 percent increase projected by Liberty as
9 most of its customers are elderly and cannot afford a 30
10 to \$50 increase in monthly utility bills. This petition
11 reflects the public's mind on this matter and I was
12 advised to give this to you.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay. Thank you very much.
14 I'll make sure and add this as an exhibit. Ms. Shelton,
15 I appreciate you being here tonight. The next name that
16 we have is Daniel Hamill. After that will be Steve Todd
17 and then Karen Cook. Mr. Hamill, if you would spell
18 your last name for our court reporter, please.

19 MR. HAMILL: H-a-m-i-l-l.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: And just to confirm, you did
21 state earlier that you'd be testifying under oath?

22 MR. HAMILL: Yes.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Please go ahead.

24 MR. HAMILL: I guess I'll just start with the
25 fact that a 30 percent increase to me just seems pretty

1 ridiculous. It's honestly kind of insulting that they
2 think that they can get away with such a huge increase,
3 because if an increase of that size needs to happen,
4 then the whole company is being managed very, very
5 poorly.

6 I come from a very poor community, and pretty
7 much everyone I know cannot afford a 30 percent increase
8 on their utilities. It's just not tenable. It's not
9 something -- it's kind of been commented on quite a few
10 times tonight is that social security, people on social
11 security don't get an increase like that. And my
12 grandma lives on it. She already has a lot of health
13 problems. She recently had a stroke. My mom and my
14 aunt had to basically take off from their jobs just to
15 take care of her. And she has all these medical costs.
16 Just adding this on top of that, it's just -- I just
17 think -- I agree with the gentleman that spoke before
18 that this is extremely predatory and I think it should
19 not be approved.

20 I can get on board with almost like a small
21 increase. That seems reasonable like maybe 5, 6
22 percent. But 30 percent, it's just insulting. Like
23 there's no reason that it needs to be increased that
24 much. So I guess that's about all I have to say.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay. I appreciate that. I

1 thank you for being here tonight. Steve Todd. Good
2 evening. Would you please spell your last name for our
3 court reporter?

4 MR. TODD: T-o-d-d.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. And just to
6 confirm, you did agree that you would be testifying
7 under oath?

8 MR. TODD: Yes.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

10 MR. TODD: The resources I looked up, Liberty
11 Electric in the last election cycle made 127
12 contributions to various state reps and senators around
13 the state. After that, Senate Bill 4 was passed and
14 signed into law by the governor. One of the key
15 provisions, and I'll read, if you read Senate Bill 4,
16 which I've looked at it, we'd be here four or five days.
17 But the key provision allows utilities to charge
18 customers for new power plant construction and grid
19 improvements while they are still being built. Shifting
20 the financial risk to ratepayers, this has been met with
21 strong opposition from consumer advocates who predict
22 significant price increases in utility bills. 30
23 percent. There it is.

24 You should be happy, the Commission should,
25 because Senate Bill 4 gives you extra money. Another

1 person said that this was the largest wealth transfer
2 from hard working people of Missouri to utilities who
3 monopolize or have the monopoly and to high tech billion
4 dollar tech companies. And that's all on our backs.

5 This to me is more of corporate greed than it
6 is for what they need. They just admitted earlier that
7 they met all their obligations and now they're asking
8 for a 30 percent price increase to pay for what they've
9 already paid for. They didn't mention the future.
10 They're talking about storm damage. They're in
11 business.

12 Everything that they mentioned is part of the
13 cost of doing business. If you wreck your car, you
14 don't go around to your neighbors and ask for them to
15 cover the deductible. You suck it up and you pay it.
16 So I think like some of the rest of them have said,
17 Liberty Utilities is very poorly run.

18 I was in the electrical business for 35 years.
19 Not on the utility side but I dealt with utilities. I
20 feel like I know where this is going to go. They're
21 asking for 30, roughly 30 percent. You're going to come
22 back and say we made an agreement with Liberty Utilities
23 for a much lower rate and then you're going to expect us
24 to be happy about it. As people have said, people in
25 this community can't afford a 5 percent increase.

1 Senior citizens only get -- this year is
2 projected to get a 2.5 percent increase in their measly
3 social security. It's unconscionable how you can allow
4 -- I've lived in numerous states, California, Idaho,
5 Washington, Texas. I moved around with a company I
6 worked for. I have never seen a rate increase this
7 large. And it looks like it's all due to Senate Bill 4
8 because it gives the utility the right to go out and ask
9 for these rate increases, and it's up to you to whether
10 you stand with the people of Missouri or with Liberty
11 Electric. Thank you.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I appreciate
13 your comments and you being here tonight. Karen Cook.

14 MS. COOK: I see your sign here.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Yes. Our microphones are a
16 little bit sensitive, aren't they. If you could spell
17 your last name first for our court reporter.

18 MS. COOK: C-o-o-k.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And I just want to
20 confirm that you did agree earlier to testify under
21 oath.

22 MS. COOK: Yes.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

24 MS. COOK: So I want to say I wanted to ask a
25 question earlier but before I came I looked at the

1 intent of the raise was partly to go into all the
2 details. Some of it was what really concerned me and I
3 want to address is I understand the need for -- I just
4 wrote it all out. To modernize and invest in future
5 energy but I'm troubled by the transition of moving
6 toward wind and solar without full accountability and
7 transparency. These technologies are not without
8 serious down sides.

9 Wind and solar require large amounts of land
10 and I wondered about that 6 acres someone mentioned
11 earlier. I don't know if you all were here to hear that
12 6 acres were bought up by Liberty. You see these
13 horrific looking areas that used to be cattle fields or
14 whatever. They're full of solar panels.

15 So another troubling thing about all this
16 solar and wind is just the lack of planning for the end
17 of life waste. Industry experts estimate that by 2030,
18 which is actually only five years away, millions of tons
19 of decommissioned wind turbine blades an equivalent of
20 3,000 football fields worth of waste is going to be
21 accumulated, you know, just in these short years.

22 One million tons of solar panels will all end
23 up in landfills creating long-term environmental hazards
24 that we the ratepayers may ultimately be asked to clean
25 up. These forms of electricity require heavy

1 governmental subsidies and tax credits and they distort
2 the energy markets and they also hide the real true
3 cost. We've all seen that with people just in their own
4 little houses buying these solar panels and getting all
5 these rebates back. How can you compare if your
6 government is paying half, you know, all us taxpayers
7 are paying the other half, right. That money doesn't
8 come out of the blue.

9 So on top of it, I just read on like I said
10 online that you guys have plans to move that direction.
11 When I see these coal plants being closed down and I
12 know that some of it is because of government
13 regulations. And I have to just bring up the James
14 River even though that's not you, but I just know that
15 one better than the Asbury that you guys closed. That
16 was a super efficient coal plant. They were asked to
17 increase their efficiency. They had gotten so efficient
18 that they couldn't make it more efficient, you know. So
19 they closed down that whole plant even though it was
20 like one of the most efficient around. It had been kept
21 up to date year after year. I know this because my
22 son-in-law is actually an engineer working for utility
23 companies. They're like so sad to see these plants
24 decommissioned and torn down. What a waste of, you
25 know, we were supposed to recycle everything and fix

1 everything but our own government -- that's what I said.
2 I'm not blaming you guys, but you guys should be voting,
3 or what was someone saying, lobbying people to not make
4 these ridiculous things. Why not individually say this
5 was a very efficient plant, James River, and so you
6 don't have to increase your efficiency by 20 percent
7 because you were already way up here but you need to.
8 Gosh darn we're all stuck in the circle of the
9 government telling you what to do and then we have to
10 end up paying for it. So who do you go to to make that
11 happen.

12 I'll tell you I'm very sad to see our dollars
13 going for solar and wind. That's just going to be a big
14 catastrophe. Anyway, you also have to store electricity
15 when you are using wind and solar. So that's another
16 big expense.

17 Anyway, I just am not against moving ahead
18 with other forms besides coal or whatever, but I am
19 against rushing into large scale renewables without a
20 full honest accounting of the economic and environmental
21 costs before raising our rates by 30 percent Liberty
22 should be required to outline their future plans more
23 specifically and balance that all out. Is there a
24 timer? I'm so sorry. Did I go over? Were you trying
25 to tell me a long time ago?

1 JUDGE HATCHER: It's okay. Go ahead and
2 finish your thought. Not a problem. We appreciate you
3 being here, Ms. Cook. The next name I have is David --
4 no, Mr. McCann. No, no. I see why you were surprised
5 about going first though. What everybody may not know
6 is Mr. McCann sat through our afternoon hearing and then
7 when his name was called he said he would prefer to go
8 this evening. I took it upon myself to sign him up
9 first. He didn't know that. So he signed up also. I
10 appreciate you, Mr. McCann. Jane Hutchinson. Thank
11 you. Ms. Hutchinson, if you'd spell your name for our
12 court reporter, please.

13 MS. HUTCHINSON: H-u-t-c-h-i-n-s-o-n.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Just to confirm, you stated
15 you would be testifying under oath?

16 MS. HUTCHINSON: Yes.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Go ahead and give
18 us your comments.

19 MS. HUTCHINSON: I really don't want to have
20 my electricity rates increased by 30 percent. I feel
21 like my family is struggling enough to pay the bills as
22 it is with kids and everything. And I do feel like I
23 hope Liberty Utilities can get their billing system
24 straight because it's been quite the hassle trying to
25 get those bills paid and having them double bill and all

1 of that. So that's it.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Let me ask a couple follow up
3 questions about billing. Are you still having billing
4 issues?

5 MS. HUTCHINSON: I was able to get ahold of
6 Liberty Utilities and she did help me figure out some of
7 the stuff, which was really great for everyone, make
8 sure your auto pay is set up for bill due date. That
9 makes a big difference. But then she was mentioning
10 earlier to like go back to September 2023 to look at
11 those prices. But I only have billing history back to
12 January because once things changed over I guess. And
13 I've had the Liberty Utilities since 2023. But like I
14 can't go get my history. If I went on to my online
15 account, I can only see back to January. I don't know
16 if I'm the only one who deals with that. It is hard to
17 get that information. And it's just been really messy.

18 JUDGE HATCHER: I understand. Thank you. I
19 appreciate you being here tonight.

20 MS. HUTCHINSON: Yeah. Thank you.

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay. We have three more
22 names and then I'll open it up to anyone in the audience
23 who has not signed up to testify and would like to.
24 Jimmy Hunter. Jimmy Hunter. And then we have Warren
25 Rose and Nicky Thompson. Jimmy Hunter. Okay. Warren

1 Rose. Thank you, Mr. Rose. If you'd spell your last
2 name for our court reporter, please.

3 MR. ROSE: You bet. It's Rose like the
4 flower, R-o-s-e.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Just to confirm,
6 you did participate?

7 MR. ROSE: I did participate, yes, sir.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead
9 with your comments.

10 MR. ROSE: Thank you, Mr. Hatcher,
11 Commissioners, other folks at the table. I'd also like
12 to recognize our law enforcement officials here. They
13 haven't been recognized. In today's world they don't
14 get treated well enough in my opinion. So thank you
15 both.

16 With that said, I'm a big picture kind of guy.
17 So I'm not going to sit here and tell you how these
18 rates are going to affect me one way or the other. I
19 don't live in this community. I live in Republic. But
20 I am an Empire customer and have been a long time. I'm
21 fortunate. I don't like the 30 percent increase or
22 whatever it may end up. Can I afford it? Am I going to
23 miss any meals? Probably not.

24 I'm, again, looking at the big picture. I
25 think we have to ask ourselves how did we get here and

1 more importantly how do we keep from getting here again.
2 So that's the thoughts I'm going to share with you this
3 evening. How we got here? Well, I think in my opinion,
4 I've heard a lot of other's opinions tonight, is it
5 greed, is it poor, whatever, management. I believe the
6 proof is in the pudding when you look at stock prices,
7 when you look at some of the changes that have been
8 made. So moving forward, again, how do we keep from
9 getting here.

10 If I understood Mr. Wilson tonight when he
11 spoke to the young lady who was talking about having
12 solar service, she was upset that she was paying 14
13 cents and something a kilowatt for energy but then only
14 getting reimbursed 3 cents and something for that
15 energy. And he explained to her that what she was being
16 paid was the actual true cost of energy the same that
17 they have. Everything else was other costs.

18 Well, it's real apparent to me that Empire
19 really isn't in the energy business. They're in the
20 infrastructure business. I work for an agency. Our
21 agency has a billion dollars worth of infrastructure in
22 the state of Missouri. So that's a lot to manage.
23 That's a lot to take care of. Sometimes you have to
24 make tough choices.

25 So I would challenge the Commission and the

1 other decision makers here moving forward that I would
2 want to see an infrastructure assets management report.
3 I would want to see where those assets are at in their
4 life expectancy. Are they halfway? Are they past their
5 life expectancy? What's the future look like going down
6 the road? As a Public Service Commission, I think they
7 should ask for a report of what that looks like so that
8 things can be budgeted accordingly so that we don't find
9 ourselves in this situation again.

10 I think that we need to have a good business
11 plan and see what that looks like moving forward. I'm
12 not sure if the Commission has that authority given the
13 fact that Liberty is a publicly traded company or
14 private company if you will in that regard. But if they
15 can do that moving forward, I think that's a good thing
16 to do.

17 My guess is that when Liberty took over,
18 because I'm familiar from this area for a long time with
19 Empire, that when Liberty took over a lot of
20 institutional knowledge walked out the door at some
21 point. Maybe not right away but since then that's
22 happened. I think that's played a huge contributor in
23 getting to where we are at today. We've got people
24 making decisions that don't have the institutional
25 knowledge, maybe not have the connection here to

1 Southwest Missouri for whatever reason.

2 But again, I urge the Commission to consider
3 these things, to look at those asset management reports,
4 was that budgeted, have a game plan, have a business
5 plan so that as we move forward whatever the rate
6 increase this time is that we don't have rate increases
7 like that in the future because I am a big picture guy.
8 I'm fortunate I'm still working. I hope to join the
9 ranks of many of these folks who are retired soon and I
10 don't want to have those expenses hit again. That's all
11 I have to say. Thank you.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Rose. I
13 appreciate your comments and being here tonight. Nikki
14 Thompson. Thank you, Ms. Thompson. If you would spell
15 your last name for our court reporter, please.

16 MS. THOMPSON: T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. To confirm, you
18 did agree that you'd be testifying under oath earlier?

19 MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

20 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead
21 with your comments.

22 MS. THOMPSON: As stated earlier during the
23 question and answer, the requested \$152.8 million is
24 only until the next assessed time when it may or may not
25 be renewed. This is to continue their profit margins.

1 The company is not operating at a loss as they stated.
2 But these improvements, this money that will go towards
3 improvements and efficiency will not come back to
4 customers. That will continue to go to stockholders'
5 profit margins.

6 Liberty is the most expensive utility in the
7 area and they do not manage their money well by
8 requesting a 30 to 40 percent increase on customers.
9 That is a burden that should not be assessed to people
10 who do not have the option of picking a provider.

11 Also, as many of you know, there is a list of
12 taxes and fees and costs on your utility bill, and an
13 increase in the rates will cause another increase in
14 those taxes, fees and costs. We're already paying, you
15 know, 10 to 20 bucks a month for the Asbury whatever.
16 That will also go up if the rate goes up. So that's
17 kind of a hidden little thing there they like to do.

18 I personally have never had a problem with
19 Liberty's customer service. About a year ago I did not
20 receive a bill. I called them assuming it had been lost
21 in the mail. But an error in their system it had not
22 created a bill. They were very Johnny on the spot to
23 get that fixed and suggested that I prepay so I would
24 not be late on a bill that did not exist. Thank you.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Can I ask a couple follow up

1 questions?

2 MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

3 JUDGE HATCHER: Did you prepay?

4 MS. THOMPSON: No.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay.

6 MS. THOMPSON: I told them I said you will
7 note on my account that I do not owe you anything yet
8 and when I get the bill and it is due I will pay it by
9 its due date.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Has that all been straightened
11 out?

12 MS. THOMPSON: Oh, yes. They got me the bill
13 just real quick.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate that.
15 That is the end of our sign-up. Yes, I recall.

16 MS. PILKENTON: It was brought to my attention
17 yesterday and I couldn't believe it. I'm like there's
18 no way.

19 JUDGE HATCHER: Ma'am, can you tell me your
20 name?

21 MS. PILKENTON: I'm sorry. Kay Pilkenton,
22 P-i-l-k-e-n-t-o-n.

23 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I've got it.

24 MS. PILKENTON: I did not raise my hand
25 because I didn't think I was going to.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Let's go ahead and swear you
2 in.

3 MS. PILKENTON: If you want to swear me in, go
4 ahead.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Do you solemnly swear or
6 affirm that your testimony will be truthful?

7 MS. PILKENTON: Yes, I do.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And please spell
9 your last name for our court reporter.

10 MS. PILKENTON: P-i-l-k-e-n-t-o-n.

11 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

12 MS. PILKENTON: Okay. Let me get this pulled
13 back up here. It was brought to my attention yesterday
14 and I didn't believe it I grew up on Spring River. And
15 someone said well, you know Liberty Utilities owns the
16 head of Spring River almost 6 acres. I said no. Well,
17 if you look it up, Liberty Utilities LLC. A Mormon
18 family I know has owned this, it's like 200 some acres,
19 and they own all around it but there's five point some
20 acres, almost 6 acres Liberty Utilities LLC owns.

21 So then I think well, is this part of a bigger
22 plan. What are they planning on doing at the head of
23 Spring River which I feel like Liberty Utility has no
24 business owning the head of Spring River and why this
25 Mormon bunch sold that to them their land all around it.

1 I'm a little confused. I want to get to the bottom of
2 it.

3 So the president was here. And he says as far
4 as I know we know nothing about it. So I was talking to
5 him. He called one of his buddies. We conferred and
6 another lady is looking it up. We're trying to decide
7 if it's maybe Liberty's water at this point after I've
8 talked to them. We don't know. They're going to follow
9 up on it.

10 What's the plan for this down here? I'm not
11 sure how long they've owned it but I will find out.
12 I'll try to find out from that family, you know, what
13 the plan was, what they've told them. I need to find
14 out how long they've owned it.

15 And so is this part of a bigger plan with
16 Liberty, you know, because a 30 percent increase, yeah,
17 that would build I don't know what. We don't know. So
18 they're still trying to figure that out and hopefully
19 get back to me, you know, and so now I'm thinking well,
20 is that part of -- I had an uncle that was a state
21 geologist. I think Liberty or whoever years ago did a
22 big water well south of town. They said it's not going
23 to be a good well. It's not been a good well. Did they
24 buy this thinking that they would have to use this for
25 water? I don't know. I'd just like to know the answer

1 to that question and why this family still owns all
2 around it and there's this -- I mean, it's the head of
3 Spring River where it starts. It says if you look it up
4 on here, it clearly shows that Liberty Utility owns 5.42
5 acres the head of Spring River. So, you know, I'd like
6 to know what the plan is, if it's something that plays
7 into this. So I think that's all I need to say about
8 that. Okay. Thank you.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate you
10 being here tonight. Okay. That ends our witness
11 sign-up list. If anyone in the audience would like to
12 come on up and give their comments, now is that time.
13 We'll follow a similar format. I'll ask you to spell
14 your last name and then I will swear you in. So
15 welcome.

16 MS. DINES: Thank you. Bridget Dines,
17 D-i-n-e-s.

18 JUDGE HATCHER: And let me swear you in. Do
19 you solemnly swear or affirm that your testimony will be
20 truthful?

21 MS. DINES: Yes, sir.

22 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

23 MS. DINES: At the end of April we experienced
24 a storm, tornado in the area. Power went out. And I
25 didn't think anything of it. We all got our generators.

1 We did what we needed to do. I saw a Facebook post in
2 early May that said that somebody with Liberty had usage
3 showing on their account. I went to go look at our
4 account. We had usage showing on the days without
5 power. Contacted Liberty and to their credit as far as
6 I can tell from the math from that billing period we
7 were not charged for any usage. That has been corrected
8 on the graph on the account. However, looking at that
9 particular billing period, I have a single day where we
10 used according to our Liberty meter 109.763 kilowatt
11 hours on April 12. The next highest day in that billing
12 period is 35. I don't remember throwing a party. I
13 think I would. But that got me to go back and look at
14 some of our other billing discrepancies.

15 On this particular situation, I contacted
16 Liberty and I was told that sometimes during a storm the
17 lines can be zapped and that is why my meter reported
18 time. What I've since heard from Liberty repeatedly
19 since then is that their system is designed to estimate
20 kilowatt hours when the meter is not communicating.

21 That is not my definition of a meter, nor do I
22 think it's Webster Dictionary's. It needs to be a
23 measurement of the service that's actually used. I
24 contacted Liberty again after not hearing from a
25 supervisor to explain why my meter was not working

1 correctly and did not get a supervisor. I got read
2 Liberty's official statement on the issue where they
3 said everything is working as intended but we're working
4 with our vendors to correct an issue that doesn't exist
5 is how I read it at least.

6 Did not hear from a supervisor again. I asked
7 expressly during that call if someone could come
8 validate that my meter was working. I don't know if
9 that's the issue or not. I would think I would see more
10 evidence of invalid readings if it was. But that's the
11 first step is being reasonable and trying to discover a
12 problem.

13 Until today going to these tables over here I
14 have not heard from Liberty. I had to go face to face
15 in this forum to get billing to set up a meter
16 validation and meter test which is supposed to happen
17 Monday. We're three months past. That's how important
18 we are as customers. They will not call us back. We're
19 an ATM machine and they're coming to you to tell us that
20 we need to give them more and more and more.

21 It's unacceptable. They made improvements.
22 They made investments. They're still making money and
23 it's just not enough. And that's unacceptable. Since
24 this has happened and I now have a situation on the
25 portal where I can see that usage appeared where none

1 should have been recorded. I have gone back and looked
2 at previous months' billing statements.

3 I just want to read to you guys November 17,
4 2024, this is directly from the portal that Liberty
5 offers us as information about our usage. November 17,
6 30.791. November 18, 13.285. November 19, 29.308.
7 November 20, 70.388. November 21, 123.21. November 22,
8 zero. November 23, 167.573. November 24, 200.678.
9 November 25, zero. November 26, 188.17. November 27,
10 zero.

11 If that does not support that Liberty does not
12 have any idea what they are doing, I don't know what
13 does. They have an active audit. They're not here for
14 the community. They're here for a handout just like the
15 grant they applied for and got that we won't see any
16 deferment from in expenses.

17 I want to leave you with a thank you for
18 having this, because I don't know how we would be where
19 we are now. I don't know what we as a community could
20 have done to try and combat this without you giving us
21 this forum, because when we call they'll answer.
22 Customer service is lovely but they're a wall. And I
23 feel bad for them because nothing is going to come from
24 the top down without you guys holding them accountable.
25 Thank you.

1 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Dines. I
2 appreciate you being here tonight. Any other persons
3 that haven't gotten to testify that would like to?
4 Please tell us your name, ma'am.

5 MS. HURST: My name is Judy Hurst, H-u-r-s-t.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Let me go ahead
7 and swear you in. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that
8 the testimony you're about to give will be the truth?

9 MS. HURST: Yes.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead
11 with your statement.

12 MS. HURST: This is the first meeting like
13 this, I mean PSC. I've been to all the other question
14 and answer sessions. I'm just amazed that somebody
15 spends money and then comes back and asks us to pay for
16 what they've already spent. I have a big problem with
17 that. Is this normal? I'm not supposed to ask
18 questions. Okay. Never mind. If this is normal, this
19 is crazy.

20 And a 39, 40 percent increase is just
21 unsustainable for the customers and I can't believe
22 anybody would -- I just can't fathom anybody would ask
23 that much.

24 My last response would be I had problems with
25 billing. And it was minimal. It was a tax issue. So I

1 just kept my monthly bills in a spreadsheet. I mean, I
2 called them and didn't get anything. Like I say, it was
3 small amounts. And I contacted the Commission and they
4 told me my account had been fixed. Well, I have two
5 accounts. One account had been fixed. The other one
6 had not. But I was told it was fixed. And my sister
7 lives next door to me. She's had horrible tax issues.
8 We've got an Ash Grove address but we don't live in Ash
9 Grove. They keep telling her it's fixed, but she keeps
10 getting bills that are wrong. And somebody from the
11 Commission is believing Liberty before they believe us.
12 So to me that's a problem. But anyway, I do not believe
13 that this rate increase -- it's just too much. Thank
14 you.

15 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate you
16 being here. Can I ask, Ms. Hurst, one quick follow up.
17 When you say tax issue and you mentioned Ash Grove, am I
18 to understand that the bill that you're getting is
19 adding on a tax but it's a tax for the locality of Ash
20 Grove?

21 MS. HURST: I got Missouri state tax on mine.
22 My sister lives next door. She got an Ash Grove tax and
23 a Greene County tax. We live in Lawrence County. And
24 they've told us it's related to the way the zip code is
25 or something. I don't know how it can get fixed and

1 then change back but it's wrong again. So.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate you
3 being here tonight. You testified already?

4 MR. BOWLES: No.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Okay.

6 MR. BOWLES: No, sir. I just talked last time
7 but not at your hearing here.

8 JUDGE HATCHER: At the question and answer.
9 I'm sorry. Please go ahead and tell me your name.

10 MR. BOWLES: Victor Bowles, B-o-w-l-e-s. I
11 have not been sworn in. If you want to, I'll say it
12 under oath, whatever.

13 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Do you solemnly
14 swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give
15 will be the truth?

16 MR. BOWLES: Yes, sir.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Please go ahead.

18 MR. BOWLES: My question -- Well, more of a
19 statement is I'm not familiar why they're raising
20 because I asked probably three or four questions all at
21 once to that poor gal that was here. I think she
22 answered one. I kind of rattled them off pretty quick.
23 If this is green related as in we have all these
24 increases because we're trying to institute more wind
25 and solar, Texas is great for wind. Works great there.

1 They can do those. Solar works very well in Arizona
2 forever. Here neither one works very well.

3 If I'm going to subsidize all this garbage
4 that doesn't work well here, let me do it on my own, but
5 I don't want corporations to do it for me. I just don't
6 think -- I don't think any of us want to pay these
7 exorbitant price increases to cover this kind of past
8 policies from the last four years. I'm not saying who.
9 But I know that that was what they've been pushing for
10 years there and it works great in certain places. But
11 if they're trying to force it here, I think we're just
12 going to end up paying for stuff that isn't going to
13 work very well. It's not going to benefit us in the
14 long run I don't think, sir. That's really it. I just
15 -- Again, I can't afford a 39 percent increase in the
16 amount we use because I'm retired as well. Thank you.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Bowles. I
18 appreciate you being here. All right. We do have a
19 taker.

20 MR. COATNEY: Thank you. I may get myself in
21 trouble because one of my bosses is sitting right there.

22 JUDGE HATCHER: Go ahead and give your name
23 first.

24 MR. COATNEY: Yeah. Wes Coatney,
25 C-o-a-t-n-e-y. And I took the oath but we forgot one

1 important part, we're in Aurora, so help me God.

2 JUDGE HATCHER: Go ahead.

3 MR. COATNEY: I absolutely take the oath. My
4 name is Wes Coatney, and I have the privilege of being a
5 citizen of Aurora and also the honor as serving as the
6 chief of police for the communities of Aurora and
7 Marionville. I apologize for my appearance. They asked
8 for some plain clothes police presence in the room
9 today. So I took that job and so otherwise I'd be more
10 presentable to you. I apologize for that.

11 I stand here today. I took some notes
12 listening this morning and this afternoon and I kind of
13 put some notes together just to give you kind of a
14 little bit of a perspective from my point of view.

15 I'm here today not as an expert in utilities,
16 and the nice folks from Liberty that's been here and I
17 work with Liberty in law enforcement on a regular basis,
18 great people, linemen, the folks I have absolutely no
19 problem with. And I know these folks have people that
20 they answer to just like I do. Sometimes you have to do
21 things you don't necessarily want to do. I suspect that
22 might be what's happening here.

23 But I'm also someone that has sworn an oath to
24 protect and serve the people who will bear the weight of
25 you-all's decision. That's why I felt like I kind of

1 needed to say something. Disclaimer. I get a little
2 emotional when I talk about these people. They've given
3 me a great life. 27 years in law enforcement. The
4 citizens I serve are good, good people. They are the
5 people who would bring a casserole to a neighbor that's
6 in need. They are the people who would fill a hospital
7 waiting room if I was seriously injured in the line of
8 duty. They are people who would give what they can even
9 when they don't have much themselves.

10 But this town is not wealthy. 60 percent of
11 Aurora under the age of 65 is on some form of government
12 assistance. I know that from doing the stats that I do
13 for law enforcement. Many are surviving on social
14 security benefits that barely stretch to cover the cost
15 of food and medicine. They're paying staggering medical
16 bills and outrageous insurance premiums. They're
17 fighting daily against an economy that has absolutely
18 punished them for the last five years.

19 When I'm called to a home where the power is
20 off in the middle of July and I'm kneeling on the floor
21 of a sweltering house giving CPR to an elderly resident
22 who couldn't afford their electric bill, that's why I
23 decided to stand up and say something. And that's
24 happened.

25 When my officers and I at one o'clock in the

1 morning deliver blankets to some little kids in January
2 because their parents can't afford to turn on the heat,
3 that's why I decided to stand up and that happened I
4 personally deliver those and have many, many times.

5 The proposed 30 to 40 percent increase is not
6 just a number on a ledger. These are real human beings
7 that are living in our community and barely making it
8 day to day. It's a difference between life and death
9 for them. And I have sworn to protect them. I think
10 just staying quiet was not the right thing to do. It's
11 a difference between a family eating dinner or sitting
12 in the dark.

13 I just implore you to look beyond the
14 financial charts and corporate projections and see what
15 the human cost is here. 30 to 40 percent is not
16 negligible. This community cannot sustain that kind of
17 burden. Neither one of the communities that I represent
18 can. It's not fair and a lot of them just simply can't
19 survive it. So on behalf of the people that I've sworn
20 to serve and on behalf of the oath I've taken, I just
21 urge you to really, really consider this and not approve
22 an upwards of 40 percent increase on a bill that they
23 already are willing to pay. Thanks.

24 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, sir. I appreciate
25 you being here tonight. Okay. We are very quickly

1 wrapping up. Is there anyone else? Yes. Please come
2 forward.

3 MS. STELLWAGEN: Danielle Stellwagen.

4 JUDGE HATCHER: Would you please spell your
5 last name for our court reporter?

6 MS. STELLWAGEN: Yes, S-t-e-l-l-w-a-g-e-n.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: Let me swear you in. Do you
8 solemnly swear or affirm the testimony you're about to
9 give will be truthful?

10 MS. STELLWAGEN: I do.

11 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

12 MS. STELLWAGEN: So I know a lot of people
13 have been up here. Sorry, I'm really nervous. I might
14 mumble a little bit. We live, and you've heard it, we
15 live in a community and many communities where families
16 can't afford a 30 percent to 40 percent increase. We
17 can't.

18 Cost of living raises on average -- what is it
19 in the right of Liberty to come back and ask for more
20 than that person is receiving every year if they receive
21 it in the year. That is expecting them. They're
22 expecting them to turn around and take that livelihood
23 that they can only use that they might possibly get to
24 turn around and then increase that by, what, an extra 50
25 percent. That's hard enough on families and senior

1 citizens in our counties and our communities but then we
2 take a turn. I have 20 years my husband and I have been
3 married and have lived in this town. I love this town.
4 But with these constant increases, and you are not here
5 for water, I understand that, but we got a 105 percent
6 water increase. Our bill was \$29. It's now \$62 on the
7 water side every month for 3,000 gallons of water. That
8 is insane.

9 So then Liberty turns around and asked for
10 this increase. I love my home. My home has been where
11 I raised all my babies. But I will turn around and look
12 for a home outside of Liberty usage to maintain, to be
13 able to afford to maintain my home. I'm trying to help
14 put babies through college. We can't do that if you
15 constantly eat at us.

16 I understand everything comes at a price. You
17 want to increase it 4 to 5 percent, 6 percent if need
18 be. Like somebody else said, we're going to have to
19 absorb that somewhere. But a 30 to 40 percent is
20 untouchable for most families. That is a whole house
21 payment. If I was willing to make an extra house
22 payment, I would already have my house paid off by now.
23 I can't afford that.

24 I do -- When the storms came through, I did
25 thank Liberty last time that they were here for bringing

1 the water in for everybody. I did appreciate that. But
2 on the other side of everything, billing side, the
3 customer service, it is terrible and needs a lot of work
4 before I would even suggest letting them have any kind
5 of increase. That's it. Thank you.

6 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate your
7 comments and being here tonight. We have another. Come
8 on forward.

9 MS. EASTIN: I'm Tracy Eastin, E-a-s-t-i-n.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Eastin. Let me
11 swear you in. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the
12 testimony you're about to give will be the truth?

13 MS. EASTIN: Yes.

14 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Please go ahead.

15 MS. EASTIN: My husband and I have only lived
16 here a little under two years, and we came from
17 Springfield with City Utilities. And several things.
18 One, our bills equivalent are about a third for
19 electricity, water and sewer are about a third more here
20 than they were in Springfield.

21 I'm wondering if Liberty has yearly budgets
22 and the next year transparency with how they spent the
23 money because it appears they used debt and
24 shareholders' money to do all the improvements and now
25 they want us to pay that back. And in America we have a

1 huge debt problem. We have a national debt. We have a
2 student loan debt. We have a credit card debt. All of
3 it ready to explode or a bubble to burst, and I don't
4 think that our utility should be using debt to do their
5 business. They should manage their money, do the
6 improvements as they have the money and not come to us
7 with a 30 percent increase to pay back what they used
8 and they used it with debt. That's all I have. Thank
9 you.

10 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Ms. Eastin. I
11 appreciate you being here tonight. Sir. Go ahead and
12 tell me your name.

13 MR. EASTIN: My name is John Eastin,
14 E-a-s-t-i-n. As you probably know I was connected to
15 the last person.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Yes, I made the connection.
17 Let me swear you in. Do you solemnly swear or affirm
18 that the testimony you're about to give will be
19 truthful?

20 MR. EASTIN: I do.

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Go ahead.

22 MR. EASTIN: As Tracy said, we've been down
23 here a couple years. Before that we lived in
24 Springfield. Between us we were just getting married at
25 that time we had three different properties. Our bills

1 for three different properties were equivalent to
2 basically what we pay Liberty now except in Springfield
3 it included gas. So three properties equal to the one
4 that we live in now. I'll tell you the customer service
5 was spectacular in Springfield compared to what we pay
6 now. I mean, it's unbelievable.

7 And I just think that if Walmart was to bump
8 their prices 30 percent, we have other options. Right
9 now we're in a situation where they're going to mandate
10 that they do this. We're not going to have any other
11 options. We can't vote them in or out. I just think
12 it's wrong. I think we ought to at least have options
13 if they're going to bump it that kind of money we ought
14 to have the option to be able to vote whether we keep
15 them here or not. Thank you.

16 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you, Mr. Eastin. I
17 appreciate you being here tonight. We had another
18 gentleman making his way. Go ahead and tell us your
19 name.

20 MR. DUDA: My name is Robert Duda, D-u-d-a.

21 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. And I'll swear you
22 in. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that your testimony
23 will be the truth?

24 MR. DUDA: Yes, I do.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Please go ahead.

1 MR. DUDA: My name is Bob Duda. I live in
2 Marionville, Missouri. I am an accountant. I'm also a
3 volunteer firefighter, have been for the last 12 years.
4 So I've served alongside that man that just spoke a
5 minute ago, Mr. Coatney, and I can definitely testify to
6 some of those things that he said.

7 The poverty line in the state of Missouri is
8 12.6 percent of the citizens of the state of Missouri
9 live below that line. In Aurora, Missouri, that number
10 is 17.23 percent, one of the highest in the state for
11 any community.

12 The number of people that you're putting in a
13 very poor situation by raising 30 to 40 percent for
14 their utility bills, 30 percent of the base rate and
15 then all the other things that calculate on top of that,
16 is putting those people in a very horrible situation.
17 Yes, there are programs that they can apply for, other
18 programs that are available but it doesn't mean they're
19 going to qualify. You're putting a lot of people of the
20 community that I love and that I serve in a very
21 horrible position, a position that they have no control
22 over whatsoever.

23 I do hope that you deny this request for
24 Liberty Utilities. I also work for a company that is in
25 Marionville, Missouri. We bought that piece of property

1 in August of 2024, received our first utility bill in
2 March of 2025. We received seven bills at the same time
3 in the mail on the same day. All separate but we
4 received all seven bills the same day.

5 When I called to request why we received all
6 bills on the same day, that's just what you owe. You
7 have 14 days to pay them. So we had to pay all those
8 bills on that day so that we wouldn't lose our power
9 when we only had a bill for that day when we had power
10 for the last seven months.

11 Again, one of the other things that I do is I
12 am the homeowner and the property owner that puts on the
13 largest residential light display in the state of
14 Missouri. One thing you're going to do to me is you're
15 going to hurt me real bad. But if that is what it is,
16 as utilities go up and as things change, that's
17 something that my wife and I have always eaten. My wife
18 eats it with me. I make the decision. I pay for it at
19 home. But that is something that I do for this
20 community.

21 We do have a poor community. We have a
22 community that isn't able to do a lot of things because
23 of the low incomes, but that's something that I do for
24 this community to give back to them. By this large of
25 an increase, my bill for that month is usually \$500.

1 That bill now becomes 750 to \$850. It's just something
2 that this community may lose because of a decision that
3 is made by that utility company. Thank you for your
4 time.

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. Don't go anywhere.
6 I do have a follow up question. I want to circle back
7 to your bills. August of '24 --

8 MR. DUDA: When I purchased.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: -- is when you purchased. May
10 of '25?

11 MR. DUDA: March. March of '25 we received
12 all seven bills for September, October, November,
13 December, January, February and March. Sorry. April is
14 when we received that. We received the March bill. We
15 received all bills from September through March on the
16 same day.

17 JUDGE HATCHER: Are your billing issues
18 resolved as of today?

19 MR. DUDA: Online I resolved those issues,
20 yes. I did not get any resolution from the utility
21 company themselves. We just paid it. Yes, we are now
22 receiving a regular bill online now that we have access
23 to that. We didn't have access to that until we had the
24 account number because we never received a bill.

25 JUDGE HATCHER: Thank you. I appreciate you

1 being here. I'll call one more time for any witnesses,
2 Yes, come on down, sir.

3 MR. FOREHAND: I spoke awhile ago. I know
4 you're not --

5 JUDGE HATCHER: Sir, you testified already.

6 MR. FOREHAND: Larry Forehand.

7 JUDGE HATCHER: I'm sorry.

8 MR. FOREHAND: No duplicates.

9 JUDGE HATCHER: I'd have to let everybody go
10 again. We've been really trying to make sure.

11 MR. FOREHAND: No, I understand.

12 JUDGE HATCHER: I apologize. We do still
13 accept comments online. So if you go to the website
14 psc.mo.gov, in the upper right-hand corner it says
15 submit a comment. Put down this case number and that
16 will be perfect. I understand it's the end of the
17 hearing. We're almost done. It seems like it would be
18 a very easy yes, but I've been so strict in all of these
19 hearings. Just everybody gets one bite at the apple. I
20 apologize. Anyone else?

21 I'm going to close the hearing in just
22 minutes. Okay. Let me go ahead and repeat the
23 instructions. If you do want to give comments online or
24 if you know of friends or family that couldn't be here
25 that do want to make comments, it is the Public Service

1 Commission's website, psc.mo.gov. The case number is
2 ER-2024-0261. Just go to the website in the upper
3 right-hand corner it says submit a comment. Include
4 that case number. The case number is ER-2024-0261,
5 0261. With that, would any Commissioners like to make a
6 closing comment?

7 COMMISSIONER KOLKMEYER: Yes, please. Thank
8 you, Judge. On behalf of Chair Hahn and the other
9 Commissioners, I want to thank each and every one of you
10 that came out this evening. You all could have done a
11 lot of other things tonight except come to a meeting
12 like this. We've had a great crowd and we've had a lot
13 of really good comments. Also want to thank our law
14 enforcement, our uniformed and our plain clothes for
15 coming this evening. We really appreciate our law
16 enforcement. So with that, I here again want to thank
17 everyone for coming out.

18 JUDGE HATCHER: Yes. Our appreciation to
19 everyone. This hearing is adjourned and we are off the
20 record. Thank you all.

21 (WHEREUPON, the proceedings concluded at 9:12
22 p.m.)
23
24
25

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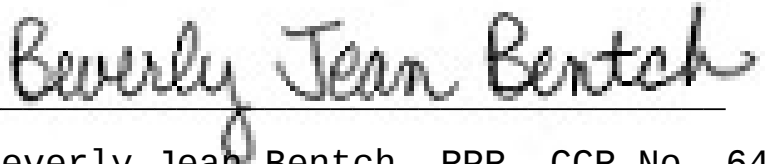
STATE OF MISSOURI)

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 7th day of August, 2025.



Beverly Jean Bentch, RPR, CCR No. 640

\$	105 58:5	2022 13:12	60:7 61:8 62:13,14	65 19:16 55:11
\$12,500 26:15	109.763 47:10	2023 37:10,13	30.791 49:6	66 23:19
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\$80.39 23:9	18 20:19 21:10,25 22:9 49:6	3	60 55:10	
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