

STATE OF MISSOURI  
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Public Hearing

August 14, 2002

St. Louis, Missouri

Volume 5

CASE NO. GR-2002-356

In the Matter of Laclede Gas Company's Tariff to Revise  
Natural Gas Rate Schedules

BILL HOPKINS, Presiding,  
DEPUTY CHIEF REGULATORY LAW JUDGE.

KELVIN L. SIMMONS, CHAIR,  
CONNIE MURRAY,  
SHIELA LUMPE,  
STEVE GAW,  
BRYAN FORBIS,  
COMMISSIONERS

REPORTED BY: Tina R. Wright, CCR.



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## WITNESSES

Tim Schanuth .....	12
Shirley Arnold .....	18
Delores McMillan .....	22
Gentry Trotter .....	27
Joseph Franks .....	38
Ralph Bowser .....	46
Lloyd Cherry .....	51
Barbara Biondo .....	52
Lawrence Biondo .....	57

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JUDGE HOPKINS: We will begin this hearing and I'll ask our court reporter to go on the record. As Mr. Kelly said, we have a sign-up sheet. We want to make sure that everybody gets to testify that wants to. I only have three names on here now, and if you want to testify, please sign up because this is what we came here for is to listen to you.

My name is Bill Hopkins. I'm an appointed law judge for the Missouri Public Service Commission, and I'll be your presiding officer this evening in Case Number GR-2002-356 concerning rate increases requested by Laclede. I want to point out that this case involves the non-gas costs that Laclede has to pay. Neither Laclede or the Public Service Commission has any control over natural gas prices that Laclede pays.

Also, this case has nothing to do with Laclede's new customer assistance program. So if you have comments on the other cases that Laclede has going now, we do want those comments and Mr. Kelly will tell you how you can make sure that we get the comments that you have on those other cases. I'd like to thank the County of St. Louis for the use of this facility. I want to note that the views expressed here tonight are not necessarily those of the County of St. Louis.

Let me introduce to you the commissioners

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who are present this evening to hear your testimony. This is our Chair, Kelvin Simmons. This is Commissioner Sheila Lumpe. Now, let me ask these other people to just briefly enter your appearance starting with Mr. Dandino down here.

MR. DANDINO: Michael Dandino, Office of the Public Counsel representing the Office of Public Counsel and the public.

MR. MEYER: David Meyer. I am an attorney with the Commission and I'm representing the staff of the Public Service Commission tonight.

MR. MCNEIVE: Gerald T. McNeive, Jr., Michael C. Pendergast and Rick Zucker on behalf of Laclede Gas Company.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you. Now, we have some members of our staff, the Missouri Public Service Commission's staff here, and I've got these bright lights shining in my eyes so I'm not sure where everybody is. But if our staff would stand up so that they can see you. These people here, if you have any questions to ask them after the hearing is over, they will be glad to help. And then Laclede also has some people here. Would Laclede's people just stand up?

MR. MCNEIVE: Could I introduce them?

JUDGE HOPKINS: Sure. Go ahead.

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MR. MCNEIVE: We have John Moten [phonetic] who is our senior vice president of operations here in front. We have Gloria Threlkeld [phonetic], manager of community services, Gloria Jansac [phonetic] who also is in community services, supervisor Mike Chilitot [phonetic] and Jeff Weiss. So if people have any particular questions about their account or anything else, after the proceedings, we'll be here to answer those questions.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Just briefly, I want to tell you that the Missouri Public Service Commission is the state agency that regulates investor-owned utility companies in Missouri to insure that the rates are just and reasonable, that the quality of service is satisfactory and that safety practices are employed in their operations while at the same insuring the utility companies a reasonable rate of return to their shareholders.

The Missouri Public Service Commission is made of five commissioners who are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the senate to hear and decide cases regarding the public utility issues regulated as indicated earlier. The current commissioners are Chair Kelvin Simmons, Commissioner Connie Murray, Commissioner Sheila Lumpe, Commissioner Steve Gaw and

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Commissioner Bryan Forbis.

The commissioners, including those who are not currently present, will have the opportunity to read all the witness' testimony and remarks. The Missouri Public Service Commission employs a staff of engineers, accountants, attorneys, financial analysts and other specialists in the field of utility regulation and relies upon their expertise along with other expert testimony and consumer testimony.

These people here that introduced themselves earlier represent the PSC staff, Laclede and also the Office of the General Counsel Mr. Dandino who is one of the Assistant Public Counsels, his agency is the Office of the Public Counsel, and it is separate from the PSC, and they represent the public's interest specifically before the Public Service Commission.

I'm going to reiterate that the decision has not been made on this case, and we have these local public hearings to get your input. Your input is evidence in these cases. So we want to hear your statement or your testimony that you wish to provide to the Missouri PSC concerning the increase on non-gas costs for Laclede.

We will take your comments this evening along with evidence which includes transcripts of local

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public hearings and followup with a review and a report will be issued, including any issues that you may raise with us tonight. I'd like to ask first Chair Simmons if he has any opening comments to make at this time.

CHAIR SIMMONS: Thank you, Judge. Good evening to each and every one of you. I want to thank you for coming out because I am aware that you could be somewhere else tonight. I know that this is dinner time for a lot of individuals, and you could be doing a whole lot. But you chose to come here tonight and you chose to give us your opinions on what you think about this case that is before us.

And I want to assure you that your comments are important to us. It is important to the other commissioners, three of which that are not here tonight, but they will be reading the transcript as the transcriber basically takes your comments down. So again, I just want to thank each and every one of you for being here. I am a listening ear tonight in reference to this case that's before us, and I will look forward to your comments as you come to the podium. Thank you very much.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, Chair Simmons.  
Commissioner Lumpe, any comments?

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: I would just like to

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add my welcome to you along with Chair Simmons. Make sure that you understand the decision has not been made yet. The decision will not be made until sometime in November, and that's why we come to find out what your concerns are and what your testimony is and put it on the record. As the judge said, it can be used as evidence as we make our decision and also so the other commissioners will have an opportunity to read it and know what your comments are. So again, I thank you for taking the time to come.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Public Counsel, any opening statements?

MR. DANDINO: Yes, your Honor. Thank you. I wanted to thank you and join the commissioners in thanking you for coming out here tonight. I also wanted to express that this is a very important part of the whole regulatory process. The Public Service Commission hears from our office, hears from our lawyers and hears our comments, but this is the only opportunity they get to hear directly from you.

And it's important in the case because it gives them a different insight. It puts a face on the actual customers that their decisions affect, and it's very important. It's very important for our office, the Office of Public Counsel, because it helps

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represent you better because then we know some of your problems, maybe get a different twist on occasion on the problem that, you know, sitting in Jefferson City, we may not get that point of view.

So I strongly urge you tonight, you've made the effort to come here, I strongly urge you to sign up and go that extra step and come up here and tell the commissioners what you think because it's very important. They look at this. Our office cites your testimony in the briefs many times in pointing out some of the problems and some of the issues that the citizens have.

So once again, I just urge you to come up here and testify and be part of the record. You won't be subject to a harsh cross exam or you won't be subject to any cross examination. We may only ask you questions to clarify a few things. So come on up and thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Mr. Meyer?

MR. MEYER: I have no statement.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Mr. McNeive?

MR. MCNEIVE: Thank you, Judge. Again, I represent Laclede Gas Company. We are seeking the rate increase and we have left a sheet over there that explains some of the reasons why we are. Our job is to

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give you safe and adequate service at reasonable rates. It's pretty simple. What we find out from you tonight maybe some things that we're not doing right, and we want to know about that.

We also want to know about the things we are doing right. So we look upon this as an opportunity to hear from the public. So again, I would echo Mr. Dandino. If you have something you need to talk about to the Commission, fine. If there are some things you need to talk about after this proceeding that you want to get straight with us and find out about, we'll be here to do that. So I welcome you. I'm looking forward to your presentations this evening. Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you all very much. I do want to reiterate again that we do have staff here and we do have Laclede people here. If you have a service problem or some other kind of problem, that's part of the reason we have a local public hearing is so people have a chance to talk to another person about what their service problem is. And a lot of times, we get that straightened out here.

We have kind of a little procedure here. We're going to call your name. We'll ask you to come down here to the lectern and only one person can testify or speak at one time. As you'll notice, we

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have a court reporter down here, and she can only listen to one person at a time like the rest of us can only listen to one person at a time. So if someone else is speaking, if you'd wait your turn, and then we will all wait turns so that we don't confuse our court reporter.

After you get through making your statement, if you wouldn't mind just standing there for a while. As Mr. Dandino said, some of the lawyers or the commissioners or the judge may ask you a question to clarify something. You're not going to be put under cross examination and nobody's going to make you feel bad or anything. We may just want to clarify something that you've said. So if you wouldn't mind standing up here and waiting just a few minutes, we'll see if anybody has any questions or if they would like to clarify something.

Now, we have a list. If you're not signed up and you want to testify, and we would really appreciate it if you would testify, go back there and sign up and we'll make sure we get to you. I'm going to call the first name here. It's Tim Schanuth.

TIM SCHANUTH

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,

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testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Would you please state and spell your name for the court reporter and then give us your comments.

MR. SCHANUTH: It's Tim Schanuth, S-c-h-a-n-u-t-h. I felt compelled to be here tonight not as an enemy or anything like that of Laclede Gas. I actually work on washers and dryers for a living. I'm here on behalf of the people who just can no longer afford any further increases. In the last several years in the State of Missouri, everytime the state wanted a tax increase, they got it. Everytime they wanted to take a tax increase, they took it.

And when they failed, they came up with little ideas like well, we'll just put it in toll roads. Me and my wife both work full-time jobs and can barely survive in a low-income neighborhood. We don't have any children because who can afford them. From what I'm seeing in the last couple of years, all you Southwestern Bell companies who probably came to the Commission previously needing to put a surcharge on the phone bills, 50 cents for ten million dollars to upgrade their system that never took place because they said the technology they said they were going to put in does not exist. But yet, I still have to pay the

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charge along with every other Southwestern Bell customer of 50 cents a month for a technology that does not exist. Southwestern Bell can sell their service to customers under a different name. So I have to question whether or not 36 million dollars is really necessary. In the past, I've been an apartment manger, managed or supervised apartments. When the apartments went up for sale as condos and just right off the bat, the building owner or the realtor said these units are all gas, we want the customers to be able to have the opportunity to have gas if they want it.

Laclede Gas came out and I think over at 7544 York Drive, they put in the gas lines and 13 shiny new gas meters. And to this day to my knowledge, there's only one actually being used. So all the man hours that was used for nearly four days straight to put in collision poles, meters and so forth and stuff like that in the garage or basement plus the line out to the street was pretty useless in my opinion.

I think Laclede needs to go back and look at where they can cut the fat really because, you know, there are a lot of people out there who are going to be going hungry. \$4.69 a month can acquire nearly an entire meal for an entire family. So you're taking a meal, one more meal from a family away. I've been

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there. I grew up one of six, five bucks goes a long way. I'm not trying to be their enemy. I just think that the Public Utility Commission needs to look at all of the rate increases. I think you just forced Union Electric to drop their rates 4.3 percent because they were overcharging us for years.

I think you need to look back at Southwestern Bell and say wait a minute, these customers are actually paying 50 cents a month for something that does not exist and ask Laclede to look at where do we need to trim the fat. A lot of times I will see Union Electric workers or I'll see Laclede Gas workers with four guys standing around watching one guy digging a hole. At union wage, that's about \$25.00 an hour plus benefits. I mean that's what we're looking at here. We're looking at four safety supervisors watching one man dig.

We're looking at the same thing with MODOT, IDOT, the whole nine yards all over the city. I work as a field service technician. I am all over the city. I see things you do not see. I see the \$250,000 luxury apartments going in public housing, about at least maybe ten complexes just off the top of my head. We're tapped. I'm sorry, but we are. The average tax payer here makes less than the national average on wages.

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You guys just have us tapped at this point. We're feeling the economic pinch just like everybody else.

On to that, I pay \$12.00 a month just being a customer. Now, during the summer to run a water heater, gas dryer and a gas stove costs me \$25.00 to \$30.00 a month. Now, a web site which sells solar panels, wind generators and LP appliances have researched and found that they can -- and these people have done these things in their own home, run a gas water heater or an LP water heater, an LP dryer, an LP stove and an LP refrigerator on 1/100 cylinder propane for nearly four years.

So with what I spend in those six months between April and the end of September, if I was on propane, I could operate for 24 years these same appliances what I'm paying for six months of service during the summer right now. That is ludicrous. And then to have public service utilities say you can't have propane tanks in St. Louis County or whatever reason why, I can't have one in my yard, that's ludicrous. Because when I'm old, I'm going to be worrying about more than just pills and food on my table because most likely, Social Security won't be around.

I'm already being told I'm going to have to

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work until I'm 70 before I'm even eligible. You guys need to start thinking about the little money we are able to put back because that \$5.00 this month would be equal to \$50.00 four years from now. Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Chair Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Yes. Good evening, sir. Thank you for being here. I appreciate that. In your testimony you talked about LP, what is that?

MR. SCHANUTH: Liquid propane.

CHAIR SIMMONS: You also in your testimony talked about a particular location that had a number of I guess attachments on to a complex or something like that. I think you were saying that 13 of these things were attached, but only one is being used?

MR. SCHANUTH: There were 13 meters installed. 13 meters with the brackets in the masonry plus I believe four car guards I guess you want to call them plus a line out to the street.

CHAIR SIMMONS: And you said only one is being used. Do you happen to know why only one is being used?

MR. SCHANUTH: The property was last rehab'd in the '70s, and they put electric AC and heating units in the windows like we find in hotel rooms. So when the properties were sold as condos for individual

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properties, only one buyer actually had a central unit put into the building in their apartment. So out of 13 units, only one actually uses a central heating and cooling system with natural gas. All the others still to this day, probably within the last year, all of them still run on heating and cooling units in the windows. They don't use natural gas whatsoever.

CHAIR SIMMONS: Just curious. Thank you, sir. I appreciate your testimony.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Commissioner Lumpe?

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: I just want to thank you for coming.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Do any of the lawyers have any questions?

MR. DANDINO: I have no questions. Thank you very much for coming.

MR. MCNEIVE: No. But thanks for coming.

JUDGE HOPKINS: The next person I have on the list is Shirley Arnold.

SHIRLEY ARNOLD

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Please state and spell your name for the court reporter and then give us your

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comments.

MS. ARNOLD: My name is Shirley Arnold, S-h-i-r-l-e-y, A-r-n-o-l-d. We really don't need no tax increase with Laclede Gas Company. You all have different programs for, you know, like energy assistance. Laclede Gas Company has a program for people who can't pay their gas bill, but still you put us in a high bracket anyway. Like if I got a gas bill for \$190.00, you all might put me on a budget for \$69.00.

I'm on disability after being a nurse for 30 years. I really can't afford \$69.00 right now because the only income I've got is me. And also, Laclede Gas Company came in my home about maybe four or five years ago. They told me they had to change my meter because I didn't have a higher gas bill, and they told me they had to change my meter because I wasn't using enough gas. So they came and gave me a new meter. I guess now the gas that they want me to use and the amount that they want me to pay is what I'm paying now.

I'm speaking for everybody else because a lot of us cannot pay these gas bills, utility bills. We are really struggling. As far as an increase, we don't need it. We can't afford it. I know you all are paying too, but you all might have the money or

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whatever to pay your gas bills and whatever else, but the majority in the country now, everybody is struggling now. We just don't need no increase from Laclede Gas Company. That's all I have to say.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you. Chair Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Ms. Arnold, I appreciate your testimony. Thank you for coming down.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: When the new meter was put in, were you getting higher bills

MS. ARNOLD: Higher bills. They told me that they couldn't believe what they were reading because it wasn't enough gas that I was using, it wasn't high enough. So they came and gave me a new meter.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: And that increased the amount?

MS. ARNOLD: Yes, ma'am.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any questions?

MR. DANDINO: Ms. Arnold, I'm Mike Dandino with the Office of Public Counsel. You were talking about you have \$190.00, but you're on the budget payment?

MS. ARNOLD: Yeah. I had to go on the budget.

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MR. DANDINO: How much do you pay on that?

MS. ARNOLD: \$69.00

MR. DANDINO: Does that include some older bills that you're trying to catch up on?

MS. ARNOLD: Yeah. My bill is \$190.00, and I called to go on the budget, and she told me to pay \$99.00. I told her I can't afford \$99.00 so she told me they would put me on a budget of \$69.00, and I've got the balance of \$30.00 that I've got to pay with the budget. So I am on the budget of \$69.00. I cannot really afford it, but if I have to do it, I have to do it the best way I can to pay it or my gas will be cut off.

MR. DANDINO: I just want to make sure that if you would, you can talk to some of the Laclede people here tonight. I think they might want to explain it, and I think the Commission might want to know about this meter problem or meter issue. I want to make sure that it gets followed up on. If it doesn't get met to your satisfaction, feel free to contact our office.

MS. ARNOLD: Thank you.

MR. MCNEIVE: I have just a couple things for clarification. There's assistance for payment of gas bills, perhaps you're familiar with that. We just want to make sure that if you're having a hard time

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with your bills, there are some of our people here who can talk to you about that. Also, I want to look into the metering issue. Can you tell us what your service address was at that time?

MS. ARNOLD: The same address. 3524 Lincoln Avenue, St. Louis County.

MR. MCNEIVE: Very good. Is it possible that that meter wasn't registering? Did they tell you if there was something wrong with the meter?

MS. ARNOLD: They said I'm not registering a gas bill or the gas bill wasn't reading high enough so they had to come in and change it. So there's a new one there now.

MR. MCNEIVE: Okay. I want to make sure we followup on this to see what the purpose was. Thank you very much.

MS. ARNOLD: Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, ma'am. We appreciate it. Delores McMillan is next.

DELORES MCMILLAN

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Will you please state and spell your name for the court reporter?

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MS. MCMILLAN: My name is Delores McMillan, D-e-l-o-r-e-s, M-c-M-i-l-l-a-n. I have several things to state, and I know this from experience that all these statements that I have presented to you all or will present to you all are true because I have experienced it. And right now, I do not understand how come this place is empty the way it is.

Laclede Gas Company has more people here on their behalf than the poor people. We should have a mass of people here because the only thing that's going to change Laclede Gas Company, UE and all the rest of these utility companies is a mass of people, and we do not have this so things are not going to change.

The first thing I want to bring to the table is there's too many poor people on the street. Most of them are women with children. They don't have no place to stay. Too many elderly people living on a fixed income cannot pay their gas bill. Old people are found dead in their homes because their gas has been disconnected by Laclede Gas Company.

Three, too many people are losing their jobs. Thousands of people are losing their jobs every month. You cannot pay a high gas bill on minimum wage which is 5.15 or \$6.00 an hour. You cannot do it. Four, I have passed mail for the post office for seven

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years. My district was Creve Couer and Westwood. The people out in Westwood and Creve Couer have luxury mansions. The gas bill was less than the ones in the city. People in the city would have \$400.00 gas bills and I came back to Creve Couer and Westwood, they would have like \$60.00 gas bills. They have mansions. And I would like to know why.

Five, I am tired of hearing on the news about families being burned out because they have had their gas disconnected and are using space heaters. Everybody knows when you use space heaters constantly, they get hot. The plugs in the outlet gets hot and sooner or later, you're going to have a fire. Sometimes it gets so cold in St. Louis people do not care. They take a risk of letting their heater burn all night long and get burned up.

This is all I have to say. So I hope and pray that you all don't go up on people's gas bill no more than what it is. I also have another comment about this dollar help. I've had several people who have come to me and told me that they had tried to get help will dollar help and have had no luck. They have called three and four times, Urban League or Step Down or whatever it is. By the time they have got to them, Laclede has already cut them off or they'll say get

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down and pay something on this bill; if you don't, you're going to get cut off. This is all I have to say.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you. Any questions?

CHAIR SIMMONS: A comment and then a question. Good evening, Ms. McMillan. It's a pleasure to have you down here. I think we agree on something. You and I probably both agree that I wish too that we had more people here at this hearing, and I think as you have stated, when you have more people that are informed and know what's going on that the better off the public is in terms of knowing what's going on. Could you tell me, what do you think we should do to get more people at these kinds of hearings?

MS. MCMILLAN: People have been beaten down so many times by Laclede Gas Company. I have talked to people and they said we have come to these meetings and they have got no where. Laclede Gas Company has still went up on the bill after I'm through coming down here. So people feel that they're going to do what they're going to do, and we'll just go along with it and get by the best way we can. So people have gotten fed up.

CHAIR SIMMONS: If you had a suggestion, what kind of suggestion would you make to hopefully get more people to these public hearings?

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MS. MCMILLAN: I really don't know because it seems like it's no use. I have asked other people to come out, and it's only Shirley and myself. But you know what, I would like to make another comment. I think we need to be talking to the owners and stockholders of Laclede Gas Company.

They need to go out and see how people are really living in their homes and see how people have to make sacrifices whether to eat or to pay these bills that you all keep on pressuring people with. This is what I think they need to do. They need to put themselves in a position where they have to make a sacrifice to eat or pay these bills to try and get heat. It's a big cycle, you know, you decide whether you're going to miss a meal or pay your bills. Because the first thing you need to do is pay your bills before you go to the grocery store.

CHAIR SIMMONS: That's all the questions I have and thank you and Ms. Arnold for both coming down here this evening.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Commissioner Lumpe?

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: I just want to say that I appreciate you coming down.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Do any of the attorneys have any questions?

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MR. DANDINO: Ms. McMillan, my name is Mike Dandino with the Office of the Public Counsel. Kind of following up on what Commissioner Simmons was asking you about getting more people here. Our office, of course, is very concerned about that. Was there any problem? They had one in St. Charles County and at the Wainwright Building downtown. A better location, would that help or the time, any of those factors?

MS. MCMILLAN: I just think people are fed up. They are fed up. People have said that they've came to these meetings and it hasn't helped. It's just like going to the poles. It's not your vote that counts, it's who counts the votes afterwards. People are fed up. They're tired. That's the only thing I can say because I'm one of them.

MR. DANDINO: Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Anyone else? Thank you. The next on my list is Gentry Trotter. Once again, if you are here and are not signed up on this list, we would appreciate you all signing up.

GENTRY TROTTER  
of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Please state and spell your

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name for the court reporter.

MR. TROTTER: Gentry W. Trotter,  
G-e-n-t-r-y, T-r-o-t-t-e-r, President of Heat up St.  
Louis.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Mr. Trotter, before you  
begin your comments, you have handed out some exhibits.

MR. TROTTER: This has nothing to do with  
this presentation. I just forgot to give these to you  
earlier.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Well, you've handed them  
out--

MR. TROTTER: I'm going to pass them out to  
everybody. This is unrelated and has nothing to do  
with Heat Up St. Louis.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Could I please finish my  
sentence?

MR. TROTTER: Yes, you can.

JUDGE HOPKINS: You have handed out an  
exhibit here during this hearing. We're going to put  
this in the file. If you would please just briefly  
tell us on the record what this is?

MR. TROTTER: Just basically, it doesn't  
have anything to do with Laclede Gas because Laclede  
Gas doesn't handle electric. It's a be a good  
neighbor, check on your neighbor program. It's a

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cool-down assistance card. We were able through the charity of -- we have Heat Up St. Louis in the winter and Cool Down St. Louis in the summer, and we were able to work with the St. Louis Clergy Coalition and Y98 to get 100,000 of these printed so that people throughout the Metropolitan Area, including counties in Illinois, would have an opportunity to get assistance during the hot summer months because there were a lot of deaths this summer, as you all know.

So we were able to do this. And also Hardees and Schnucks distributed these along with 1700 churches that we send copies to. They distribute it as a public education to help save lives this summer. So I do apologize.

JUDGE HOPKINS: I commend your efforts. You may please give us your comments.

MR. TROTTER: First of all, I just want a point of clarification. I do think that we do need to do something as a community to get more people involved or more feedback, and I think all the parties would agree with that because the more people that know about these rate increases, whether they're for Laclede or for UE, the better it is for the entire community. A well-informed community is very essential.

We were here before and as you know, we did

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this last time, Commissioner Lumpe, when we were here that we made some comments and we had to make a few clarifications because we didn't either have all the information in front of us and in this case, you asked -- there were a couple of issues that you asked one of our members who did not have that information.

I just want to make a point of clarification on two issues. I too would like to get home. We were in St. Charles and we were there with you guys today and of course, tonight we're here. So I think this is important for the record, the Commission and to the Judge. Heat Up St. Louis is a non-profit non-utility charity who had the opportunity to speak before the Commission earlier today.

It was J. Kim Tucci, the president of The Pasta House who happens to be the chairman of the board of Heat Up St. Louis, Reverend Earl Nance of the Metropolitan Clergy Coalition who happens to be the vice chairman of the board of this 31-member board of Heat Up St. Louis, and Curt Swearingen. Curt is a certified public accountant who is responsible for our finance committee and serves as our treasurer.

We thought it very important to come back this evening to make sure that the Commission clearly understood one important response by our vice chairman

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of the board, Reverend Earl Nance, Junior. When asked by Commissioner Sheila Lumpe what exact amount Reverend Nance thought would be right as it relates to the increase of a rate hike, Reverend Nance responded initially that he had no particular number, and he mentioned the issue of property, etc. and then the necessity to have a profit.

We wanted you to please be advised that we are an all-volunteer board of directors, and the board actions are not always available at the time of testimony to all of our board members. In consultation with Reverend Nance after the previous hearing and before we came here about an hour ago, I wanted to make it clear as an elective body to the Missouri Public Service Commission that you duly note that the board voted unanimously the following, and I quote, we voted not to support any portion of the 36.1 million dollar request for several reasons, the economy as well as additional rate increases, and we felt it would just be inappropriate.

We also felt looking at the previous several years' profits of Laclede Gas, that they could afford to take those profits and apply them to their administrative expenses, i.e. salary and whatever else was related because this was not a gas usage rate hike,

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this is strictly a non-gas use proposed rate hike. So we felt that that was important. The other question was asked, and I'm trying to do this from memory, I lost part of my comments, but I'll try to do it from memory, is that the question was asked by the Laclede Gas lawyer or a Laclede Gas lawyer if Reverend Nance was familiar with all the financial details of the 36.1 million dollar proposed rate change and did he know or did he have information about the Office of Public Counsel, and the Reverend replied no to the first and yes, that he was aware to the second.

Now, it's important to let you know that our official position is that we are familiar with the request of the 36 million dollar proposed rate hike that Laclede Gas is presenting, and several of our board members have reviewed various company operations, annual reports and in particular, profits and expenses that were available to us at the time, and the need to address the rate payers' concerns of high gas bills based upon the calls that we get through our hotline in St. Louis from Missouri and Illinois customers. We were able to separate the Missouri customers from the Illinois customers. So on face value, it would not be in the best interest to support any amount to be considered applicable for a rate increase, Madam

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Chairperson, and to the Laclede legal counsel.

I apologize for the clarification.

Unfortunately, as a volunteer board, certain board members are responsible for certain phases of our fund raising and public education awareness campaigns, and the question was not directed to my personal attention as I am the volunteer chief executive officer for Heat Up St. Louis. I would like to also ask the question of the availability of the Jefferson City formal and final hearing of the 36.1 proposed rate hike.

We kind of don't get E-mails from either parties and so we have to kind of -- as volunteers, we have to kind of find this out as we go along. So we would appreciate some kind of advance public notification from the Commission and the Office of Public Counsel or anyone else that's responsible in getting the word out so that we could be available for more detailed testimony if it is required.

And obviously, between now and then, we will hopefully have available to us through the Office of Public Counsel hopefully some information. But regardless of that, you understand our position from a face value standpoint based upon the annual reports, based upon the way things are going and so forth. So we didn't want to confuse you. And to both the

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commissioners and the judge, Reverend will be sending a letter of clarification, and if we need to get it sworn with a notary, he shall do so. That's the end of my testimony.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Let me ask Mr. Meyer, is this hearing already set?

MR. MEYER: I believe it is. I don't have a calender with me, but I believe it's to start in approximately three weeks.

MR. TROTTER: Is that in Jefferson City?

JUDGE HOPKINS: Yes, sir. And it's on the web site.

MR. TROTTER: Whose web site?

JUDGE HOPKINS: The Missouri Public Service Commission's web site. If you'll check with Mr. Kelly back there when you leave, he can give you more information. Chair Simmons, do you have any comments or questions?

MR. TROTTER: Mr. Chairman, I also wanted to know how you do the notices. We found out the about the notice through the Office of Public Counsel, and it eventually came out three days in the media beforehand, and we were able to get a copy at our request.

But is it possible that -- we're talking about people, and I think Laclede and everybody in the

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room agrees that we need to get more people involved in the process, at least for nothing else, for better education. Is there any possible way to get more time for public notices for hearings?

JUDGE HOPKINS: Are you on E-mail?

MR. TROTTER: Yes, sir.

JUDGE HOPKINS: There is what we call a list serve. And Mr. Kelly, you can sign up for that on the web site, can you not?

MR. KELLY: Yes.

MR. TROTTER: From the time you get that to the time we get that, is there enough lead time; in other words, you could do that like two days before or is it done four weeks after or three weeks after?

JUDGE HOPKINS: I cannot answer all those questions. Mr. Kelly will find out the answers for you. Those are all very good questions, and I'm sorry I don't know the answer to them. We try to do as much public notice as we can. And sometimes, it's difficult to get the media to publish it. So we give out as much notice as possible. But Mr. Kelly can give you all the details of that.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: The notice has to go out to every rate payer, and I think that's supposed to go in or at least they try to put it in the month

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before the hearing is.

MR. TROTTER: We're so afraid to open our bills.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: Everyone is supposed to get a notice with their bill.

CHAIR SIMMONS: Mr. Trotter, the hearing that will take place in Jefferson City is now a live web cast. For those that have the capability of getting on the internet, you now have the ability to hear the hearing and also see the hearing while it is going on live. So the three weeks that our attorney just mentioned, when that hearing actually takes place, it will be a live web cast.

So that may be some additional information for those that are here and may have that opportunity or capability which is a technological way of bringing this hearing closer to the people if you have those kinds of links to the internet.

MR. TROTTER: I would assume eventually, there will be a way to respond. What's supposed to replace human beings is the response of being in your home or your offices and to be able to interact eventually with the live cast at some point two or three or ten years from now.

CHAIR SIMMONS: That's beyond my time.

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JUDGE HOPKINS: That would be unlikely. We have the hearing set up much like a court trial, and so we really couldn't have people in the audience making comments because of due process problems.

MR. TROTTER: But if you wanted to testify, you could do the same thing you did here or you would have to give advance notice?

CHAIR SIMMONS: I would say that from the point of being able to respond to the Commission in writing your views on what you feel about a particular case, you still have that availability.

However, that will be placed in the formal record so that everybody has the ability to see what those comments are. So that exists now. It has always existed. If people want to write and say here is my thoughts on a particular case, that can be done, but it will have to be placed in the formal record.

MR. TROTTER: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: Thank you for the clarification.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any other questions?

MR. DANDINO: No.

MR. MCNEIVE: I have no questions. Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, Mr. Trotter. The

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next person up is Joseph Franks.

JOSEPH FRANKS

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Would you please state and spell your name for the court reporter?

MR. FRANKS: My name is Joseph Franks, J-o-s-e-p-h. The last name is F-r-a-n-k-s. I received this kind of notice that Laclede Gas Company is asking permission that they're going to increase the rate that we pay, that customers pay to them, 4.40. I feel that there is no need for Laclede Gas to even ask the Commission for an increase because I feel they don't consider people who are working and they have sustained a layoff, they don't have no money coming in.

Two, they didn't consider people who don't have jobs. And three, they did not consider people who are working and just making minimum wage. And also people who are making say minimum wages or \$8.00, they cannot afford this increase because when you get a paycheck, you have about five or six deductions coming out from a paycheck.

Whatever is left for you, you're supposed to take home. When you take the check home, this is for

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your rent and your credit cards and all that, that's coming from what is left. Therefore, I strongly feel that the people who are on layoff, jobless and people who are making minimum wages or \$8.00 cannot afford the increase, no way. We can't.

Again, I feel there is no need at all for Laclede Gas to go to the Commission and ask for an increase. My reason is this, there is no other gas company in St. Louis or Metropolitan except Laclede Gas Company. Therefore, they have no competition. Since they have no competition, there is no interruption in the revenue that they receive. They are making enough money that they don't need to ask for an increase.

And most of all, talking about services that they render to customers, they do a very, very, very poor service to customers in the City of St. Louis. Why do I say this, they bill the customers by estimate, by not actually how much each customer has used for the month. And if you can't pay the whole amount, they will send to you, they add 1.5 interest to the one that you couldn't pay, what's left over. And then they will add that full amount to my bill.

Now, to my knowledge, every business man is supposed to tell people exactly how much they owe. You have to let them know how much they have used or

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consumed during the month, not by estimate. Last year or I think the third or fourth part of this year, they sent me bills on estimates. And when I received my bill since I don't know exactly how much I have consumed during the month, I make a partial payment. Finally, I received a warning letter from them that they are coming to cut my meter because I owe them so much. I didn't pay any attention to them because I know I do not use that much gas at all.

In the wintertime, I use a space heater. I don't use gas at all in the wintertime. And I don't cook much. I eat outside. So I knew for sure that the bill they sent me was wrong. The second time they sent me a red notice, something like this that is red, telling that that's my last notice before, they're going to send someone down to cut my meter because I haven't paid my bill.

I was upset and called the supervisor. The young lady who talked to me told me yes, Mr. Franks, you owe this, you owe that. And I said, do you know what you're talking about, you're not supposed to charge the customer based on estimate, you're supposed to send somebody out to read the meter. I told her precisely how much I have used. I told them if you will send somebody to come here and read my meter, I'll

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be glad to pay my bill.

They told me that they would send a meter reader to come to my place. They gave me 8:00 a.m. through 12:00 p.m. I'm supposed to go to work. I waited and waited and waited all day and nobody showed up. What kind of business is that? Does this show or reflect a professional business? Of course not. Finally, Laclede Gas one day sent somebody who came over there and they read my meter on the wall. They agreed that they had overcharged me an excessive charge.

They sent me my bill, and I sent them a check right away. Right now as I'm standing here talking before all of you, still they are sending my bill based on estimate. I have two bills at home. The letter I wrote to them, I called the office, I have copies at home. And the bill they sent to me I can produce to you if you want to see it. So I feel they are doing a poor service to the people of Missouri or St. Louis, especially, the city.

So they don't deserve any raise at all. And also, they don't take the poor people, the working poor, people who have children into consideration, people who are making minimum wages through \$8.00 an hour, or those people who are jobless. We're talking

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about \$52.80 a year. We cannot afford that. So because of your poor service, I feel they don't deserve to come to the Commission. We're tired. We're working. We don't have no money at all.

The telephone bill is going up. The rent is going up. Cellular bill is going up. All of you are witnesses. The last primary election that we had, we turned down, they voted and turned it down about the roads. Why should they come up with something like that? People are collecting taxes for our roads and bridges every year from residents and business. They have enough revenue. Why should they come back again and ask us to increase or to vote to get the money they want. I'm glad the voters turned that down. I voted against it.

So I am standing here before you today saying that Laclede Gas because of their poor services, they do not deserve to bring burden upon poor people. We're tired. We cannot afford it. And I think you should look hard into this case. I think they have enough money. They don't have any other company for competition so they have no reason to ask for increase.

A few days before, I get this. My suggestion to whoever is in charge for the public meeting like this, you should go through TV ads, you

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should go through correspondence to individuals and also to churches because some people go to church every Sunday. The pastor will announce it to them. The more you communicate to the people, the more you get their attention. If they did their job right, this place would be filled.

So I say again, me and those before who have already spoken, we don't want no increase. Right now, I've got a bill at home based on an estimate. And if you can't pay all they're charging me, it's 1.5 interest, and that is wrong. You can't charge me interest on something based on estimates. You can charge me for what I have consumed. That's what I want to tell the Commission.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, Mr. Franks. Any comments?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Mr. Franks, thank you for your passionate testimony here tonight. I appreciate your coming down here. You mentioned a little earlier that you had some correspondence--

MR. FRANKS: I do.

CHAIR SIMMONS: I'd like to have the opportunity to have you talk to our staff and talk to Laclede's Company, if you should choose, and if you'd like to see about that correspondence in resolving your

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problems on some of these problems that you mentioned earlier, we've got these people here tonight, and I'd like to see if we can't have our staff and others to assist you with some of the issues that you just talked about.

MR. FRANKS: They have told me that they don't have nobody to read the meters. They went as far as telling me that I should go down there and read the meter and then call them and tell them. I told them no, if I misread it, you're going to hold that against me and charge me for that. You don't pay me so you send a meter reader to come here and read it.

Let me give you an example. Union Electric, now, they have advanced so much so that they don't send meter readers no more. Each customer has his own meter that will reflect on computer at their office, no problem. For ten years now, Laclede Gas has promised customers that they're going to do the same thing, and they haven't done it.

And then there are a lot of people who needs a job, then they will have people for the meter reading. Laclede Gas is doing a bad job, and then you're going to come to the people that's doing business with you to ask for an increase when they're doing a poor service.

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CHAIR SIMMONS: Well, if you should decide that the information that you have would be important for us to have that information, I would like to say that I'd like to at least place it in the record or let us have it.

MR. FRANKS: I have nothing to hide. Of course. I'll call the Commission office and I'll ask them to send me a form because I want to file a complaint against them. And I did file a complaint against them, and the supervisor called me and apologized, and they sent somebody right away to come read the meter. After that, they want to slip again. Right now as I'm standing here, I've got two more bills based on estimates.

CHAIR SIMMONS: Thank you, sir.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any questions, Commissioner Lumpe?

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: I was going to ask you when you got the notice. You told me it was just a few days before this meeting?

MR. FRANKS: Yes.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any questions from Public Counsel?

MR. DANDINO: I have no questions. Thank you.

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JUDGE HOPKINS: General Counsel?

MR. MCNEIVE: Mr. Franks, I represent Laclede Gas Company, and I'd like to obtain your service address and ask you to talk with one of our people because I want to find out as well how many estimates you've had. Do you have an inside meter, sir?

MR. FRANKS: In the basement.

MR. MCNEIVE: I want to find out about this as well. So if you wouldn't mind sharing that with either Gloria Jansac or Gloria Threlkeld, I want to find out your address and we can look into your account.

MR. FRANKS: That's fine.

MR. MCNEIVE: Thank you very much.

JUDGE HOPKINS: The next name I have on the list is Ralph Bowser.

RALPH BOWSER

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Please state and spell your name for the court reporter, and then you may give us your comments, sir.

MR. BOWSER: Ralph, R-a-l-p-h, Bowser,

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B-o-w-s-e-r. The reason that I have come is to ask the Commission to really consider not only turning down this request from Laclede Gas, but looking into the basis for these requests. And the reason that I do that is this newspaper article in the New York Times from today, and I didn't know you were having such a formal meeting, but I will submit this to you as an exhibit, but I need it for just a moment to read a couple of sections from it.

This is the preliminary report from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on their studies of California. And I was at a meeting with the Public Counsel Office with the League of Women Voters when this all started in California, and I raised the issue at the time that there was something drastically wrong. We now find out months later there is something really wrong.

Their report is this, evidence that natural gas prices might have been manipulated helping to drive up power prices. And then down here it says, the investigation by the Energy Commission has also found that the common method for reporting prices for natural gas and electricity traits, surveys published in the industry publications, do not use statistically valid procedures and is subject to manipulation by traders

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who have an incentive to report false data to benefit their own trading positions.

And what that all means is that the price of gas and electricity in California clearly, they're going to have a billion dollar return to customers at least and maybe more. And those prices rolled through the country because gas companies are buying one from the other and those prices are adjusted and the natural gas price is used as a relative relationship to raise the energy price for electricity. So this all kind of connects in that way.

So I would submit to you not only that you should reject this request out of hand, but you should really have your staff investigate or hire a special group to investigate the use of this data on which all of these things were based. When people say we made a ten percent profit or a nine percent or whatever it is, all that data may not hold up. So just look at the data rather than where it came from and whether it's been manipulated and whether it's part of the national problem with Enron and people like that at the trading desk in Houston which trades almost all the natural gas in the United States.

It's a very inter-connected kind of issue, and I think it's something that this Commission should

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look into to protect the citizens of the State of Missouri. That is my comment to you, and I will give this to you. The article is on the inside also. It's a rather lengthy article, and I did not want to read that whole thing here. I know you're traveling on the road and probably don't have the time to read all this stuff anyway. But I think that's a very good article.

I have been following this issue ever since that original meeting, and I have all the printouts from the New York Times that has clearly covered this for a period of eight or nine months. If the Chairman would like to have that, I'll send them all to you. It might be interesting to see how people have said no, there's no problem, no, this never happened. And now, you take a look at the Commission Chairman who is a different person than the person that said that before, and now, they're talking in this article that possibly the numbers back to California residents may be up to a billion dollars. That's a lot of money for one summer. Those are my comments.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you very much.  
Commissioner Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Mr. Bowser, thank you very much for your testimony. I'll tell you what, I will read your article and I'll provide my information to

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you if you want to send me some additional information. I'd appreciate it, and I look forward to reading that.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any questions from General Counsel or Public Counsel?

MR. DANDINO: Thank you for coming.

MR. MCNEIVE: Just for clarification, the article you referenced may have made the paper here this morning too. I think it involved Enron and a company known as Vista in Seattle and a company known as El Paso Electric. Am I correct?

MR. BOWSER: Yes.

MR. MCNEIVE: And it was dealing with, was it not, the manipulation of natural gas prices to fire electric generation?

MR. BOWSER: Yes.

MR. MCNEIVE: You're aware, are you not, that the Office of Public Counsel and the staff of the Public Service Commission do audit Laclede Gas Company for its rate cases?

MR. BOWSER: Yes. My issue is not to do the numbers add up on paper, it's how did they get on there.

MR. MCNEIVE: That's an excellent question. I'm interested in this matter myself. I just wanted to make sure that you understood that what you were

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describing basically was gas costs which are a big part of our bill, no doubt about it, but this particular base rate proceeding here is the non-gas price portion. But nonetheless, I think you have an interesting point.

I too have followed that development with interest. And when that began to unfold, I said could we have possibly been abused by the same process, and we have haven't found that we have, but the thing continues to unfold. Thank you for bringing this to the Commission's attention.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, sir. The next names I have on the list are Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Cherry. And certainly, both of you are welcome to testify.

LLOYD CHERRY

of lawful age, being first duly affirmed to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Please state and spell your name for the court reporter.

MR. CHERRY: My name is Lloyd Cherry. L-l-o-y-d, C-h-e-r-r-y. When my wife and I came here, she signed the page. She didn't know we were going to be required to speak. So I'm really not here to say a whole lot. But I'm sitting here reading the Commission's Information Guide, and it was stating that

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the Public Service Commission mission statement is we will insure Missourians receive safe and reliable utility service at a just, reasonable and affordable rates.

Everybody has said everything that needs to be said I think. Like I said, I wasn't expecting to come up here. I was just here to hear what I had to hear. I'd like to get a card, if I may, a business card from each one of you all before I leave. I don't have a lot to say.

JUDGE HOPKINS: I appreciate your comments, sir. Commissioner Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Thank you for being here. And I'll get that card to you before we leave.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: Thank you for coming.

JUDGE HOPKINS: We have one more name, Barbara Biondo, and she is the last name I have on the list. If there's someone here that wants to testify that hasn't come up, please do so.

BARBARA BIONDO  
of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: Please state and spell your name and then give us your comments.

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MS. BIONGO: My name is Barbara Biondo, B-a-r-b-a-r-a, B-i-o-n-d-o. I pretty much just came here to make my comments. I was here I guess the last time they had a public meeting at Town and Country when the Public Service Commission was here to listen to our comments about the rate increase that Laclede Gas wanted to try to impose upon us again. I guess I got a little bit emotional at that time. I'm just going to say about what everybody else has been saying tonight.

I think we're kind of tapped out as far as the funds that we people can give to the utilities in this country. I mean we have one telephone company, one gas company, one electric company and one water company in the State of Missouri. I think we need to have a little competition. I think if there was more than one gas company in the State of Missouri, things would be a lot different, and the telephone company also.

I was telling my husband on the way in here tonight, I said, you know, it's really amazing, we had a vote on a fee on the telephone bill so they could put computers in schools and stuff like that, you know, so they could use that as a universal fee on the telephone bill. Well, it's going up again. We didn't get to vote on that one. They're going to raise that rate.

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It just keeps going and going and going. We finally have to say no, you know.

I think some of these people who are in charge of these big companies, I don't know if any of them are sitting here tonight, ought to think about maybe cutting back on some of their stock options that they're offering and maybe giving some of that money back to we people and cut our rates.

I mean I have yet to have a utility company cut my rates, forgive me, you know, a lower rate. It always just keeps going and going and going and going. I am not getting a raise every year, but the people that are running these companies are. Their health insurance is getting paid for. They're getting stock options, and they're getting nice paid vacations. I'm not. And there's a lot of other people in this room who aren't either.

I think the people on the Public Service Commission should also -- well, the notice that I got about this meeting was in my Laclede Gas bill. I don't think that was the place for it. I think you maybe should mail something out. I mean the post office gives a bulk rate, you know, for people to mail out notices of public meetings and stuff like this.

Because a lot of people that I've talked to

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just recently had no idea about this meeting that was going to go on. They said well, how did you find out. I said it was in my Laclede gas bill, and you know, oh, I just throw those things away, why should I go, they're just going to raise it, nobody really cares. So I think there should be another way of letting people know about these meetings, you know, whether it's, you know, maybe a thing in the journals that we get in local papers or, you know, in the Post Dispatch or like I said, maybe a bulk mailing would maybe help a little bit.

Because I think if somebody gets something like a brightly colored letter in the mail, they're going to pay more attention to it and maybe there would be a few more people back here. I mean this is sad. This is really sad because there's not very many people here. I almost kind of thought, you know, why bother. But if I don't, when I'm 65 and I want to retire, I'm not going to be able to heat my house anymore. I'm going to be on public assistance and maybe living in public housing. And I don't want to do that.

So I figure maybe if I come up and make my comments, maybe I'll help somebody right now that's elderly and is on welfare and who's trying to pay their bills and stuff like that. Granted, they're saying

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this isn't for the gas rate, it's for your operating things and stuff like that. You know, things can be bought in bulk and things can be cut.

You know, there can be cost cutting things done in big corporations, and there's too much excess bulk that needs to start getting cut down a little bit. Those are my comments.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you very much. Mr. Kelly who is back there will be happy to explain to you after the hearing of all the things that he does and the Commission does to publicize this. Do you have any questions or comments, Commissioner Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: No questions. Thank you again, ma'am. I appreciate your testimony and in particular your comments related to what we can do about notification. I think that point has been raised on several occasions, and I am particularly interested in how we might be able to get a larger audience.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: Thank you.

MR. DANDINO: I agree with the Chair. You think you feel bad about seeing this, sitting here from our office when we come to these hearings and only one or five or six people, no matter what the utility is. It's very discouraging. But then our office also wrestles with the problem of how do we get this out.

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We've tried direct mailing to the different newspapers, E-mailing and everything. It's a difficult problem, but it is an important problem. I like the idea of contacting the clergy and that. That's a good point.

MS. BIONDO: That's a very good point.

Thanks.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, ma'am. Lawrence Biondo.

LAWRENCE BIONDO

of lawful age, being first duly sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

JUDGE HOPKINS: If there is somebody out there who has not testified who would like to testify, that's what we came here for. Mr. Biondo, would you please spell state and spell your name for the court reporter?

MR. BIONDO: Lawrence Biondo, L-a-w-r-e-n-c-e, B-i-o-n-d-o. I have been a Laclede Gas customer for about 23 years now at two different residences. In those years, we've probably had three or four meter changes by normal things because they say the meters get old and they have to be kept safe, totally acceptable, part of their maintenance cost.

In that amount of time, I've probably seen

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three emergencies where a gas line was cut by construction or something, and Laclede Gas, the ones I've seen, they've always responded within about 45 minutes to get to the site. I give them credit for that. I also live on Sulphur Springs Road where they just had a road widening project, and Laclede Gas was one of the utilities that had to move their mains and adjust and things.

It seemed like the project went good. They had their crews out there early. The majority of their stuff was done, but there was one area that maybe they weren't coordinated or God put too much rock under the ground for them or something. But they laid this big beautiful gas main and then when the water and sewer people came through with the storm sewers, they had a crew out there for three days putting a big notch in this brand new line because something wasn't coordinated.

Now, this is a non-gas cost, right? You know, like I said, I don't know who did. But in talking to some of those guys out there, they make a good living, even the ditch diggers. They make a good, fair living. But when it comes to saying that their non-gas cost have to get covered by us, I say they certainly weren't on the band wagon ten years ago.

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None of the gas companies were when deregulation came up. None of them said let's keep the regulations to keep our cost down. None of them were against it.

Now they're telling us because of deregulation, they have to pass on costs to us. I can't accept that. Let them go back to the politicians and get the stuff regulated again and their costs will come down like they were before. And I don't feel a man that digs that ditch or repairs that gas line should live in poverty either, but when I can't do things that he can do because of the wage differences, then I've got to kind of question costs of operating.

Maybe that sounds selfish, but that's my idea on it. And the last thing is to get people to come to the meetings, it's kind of far fetched, but Laclede Gas, I think they have to operate under certain rules from the Public Service Commission, etc., etc. on billing practices and all that, you might have to get the Edward Jones Dome for the next meeting, but if they told all their customers you come in with your bill, you check in, you're going to get a 25-cent credit on your next bill, you'll fill the house up. And let that be part of their overall maintenance cost with their postage, etc., etc. I think I'll stop at that.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, Mr. Biondo. Any

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comments or questions Mr. Chair?

CHAIR SIMMONS: Thank you for coming, Mr. Biondo. We asked for ideas. Thank you, sir.

COMMISSIONER LUMPE: I've also heard when you buy food people will come too. Thank you.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you, sir. We appreciate it. Is there anybody that has not testified that would like to testify? If there is, now's your chance. I don't see any hands or flags or anything so I'm going to ask Chair Simmons -- excuse me. Ma'am?

MS. MCMILLAN: I have already testified, but I would like to make a comment, a beautiful comment on behalf of Laclede Gas Comment. I went to the meeting at Missouri University I think last year on October the 17th. A guy by the name of Chris Baker, he's the director of public relations?

MR. MCNEIVE: I'm not sure, but he's an employee of Laclede, ma'am.

MS. MCMILLAN: Well, he was the one that stuck with me because I had my two pages of questions. And he took his time out to each one of those questions. He is a beautiful person. He called me constantly to get in touch because I work two jobs. He should not be working for Laclede Gas Company because he is too beautiful. He has a heart and he has

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compassion. He told me if I have any problems at all, please get in touch with him, and he gave me his own personal number. So he's a beautiful person, but he should not be working for Laclede Gas Company.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Any closing comments, Chair Simmons?

CHAIR SIMMONS: I don't have anything other than what I've already said which is thank you to each and every one of you for coming out. We appreciate your comments. We will carefully go over your comments with this testimony with the transcription that is taking place.

The other commissioners that are not here tonight will also see those comments and those transcripts as we have finality with this decision. And again, if there are questions that you may have with either our staff or Laclede's staff, they are here and they will be here as we depart. Thank you again.

JUDGE HOPKINS: Thank you very much. We're off the record.

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STATE OF MISSOURI    )  
                                  ) SS  
CITY OF ST. LOUIS    )

I, Tina R. Wright, a Notary Public within and  
for the State of Missouri, do certify that the above  
forgoing pages are a true and accurate transcription of  
Public Hearing had before me on the 14th day of August,  
2001 at the St. Louis County County Council Chambers,  
41 S. Central, in the City of Clayton, State of  
Missouri.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand  
and Seal this 27th day of August, A.D., 2002.

MY COMMISSION EXPIRES JANUARY 8, 2005

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Tina R. Wright  
Notary Public, within and  
for the State of Missouri

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