Red Alert! Attention SC Citizens & SCE&G Ratepayers!

After relentless effort since 2008 when we first intervened against SCE&G's V.C. Summer nuclear reactor boondoggle and advocated in proceedings at the PSC for clean energy our work is being validated and doors are opening to making advances on clean energy and how energy decisions are made in South Carolina.

Please attend Public Utilities Review Committee (PURC) meeting on Wednesday, August 23, 10:30 a.m. 105 Gressette Building, State House complex, Columbia, SC. Attend the meeting to show you are concerned about utility control of energy policies in South Carolina.


The PURC reviews candidates for the Public Service Commission and the manner in which the PURC conducts its business needs full review. Three seats for the PSC are now open, applications accepted until August 11. See PURC members here and PURC website:


Is PURC member Helen Zeigler related to Belton Zeigler, the reputed author of the notorious Baseload Review Act? See article in The State, August 5, about the BLRA and Belton Ziegler's hand: How SC lawmakers pass a 2007 law that failed SC power customers

Read more here: http://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/article165641762.html#storylink=cpy

As far as I'm concerned, members of the PSC, PURC and Dukes Scott, director of the Office of Regulatory Staff, must be removed from office in the event they do not have the strength of character to resign. So far they are not acknowledging responsibility for rigging the PSC and ORS system in a manner that has led to the collapse of the VC Summer reactor construction project. The $9 billion loss for the state will hit the poorest amongst us the hardest, especially if SCE&G succeeds in saddling rate payers with all costs via payment over 60 years.

Breaking news, Saturday morning, August 5: PSC backs off schedule for hearing requested by SCE&G - Friends of the Earth & Sierra Club to intervene - PSC clerk's notice not yet posted in Docket 2017-244-E but posted here on SRS Watch website. Please consider intervening in this docket. The FOE/Sierra Club hearing docket (2017-207-E) - placed in "abeyance" by the PSC on...
August 2 may be consolidated into this docket, leaving us the ability to go back and review earlier prudency determinations and cost overruns, which we will do in the public interest to get to the bottom of this costly debacle. (See August 2 PSC order opening the door to docket "consolidation.)

Also of note - August 4 letters on special legislative session - from Senate leaders linked here & Attorney General Wilson linked here

Article about SC energy policy, the PSC & PURC:

"Who Controls S.C.’s Energy Policy?"

S.C. Policy Council, August 3, 2017

[Embedded Article Link]

South Carolina public utilities raise rates on customers at a far faster clip than utilities in other states. Why? Because much of what public utilities can and can’t do is determined by a few legislative leaders.

What is the Public Service Commission, and what does it do?

The PSC, established by the state code, is “vested with power and jurisdiction to supervise and regulate the rates and service of every public utility in this State and to fix just and reasonable standards, classifications, regulations, practices, and measurements of service to be furnished, imposed, or observed, and followed by every public utility in this State.” In other words, it has the power to regulate public utilities. That’s a very big deal. Why? Because public utilities are defined by law to include just about everything: telephone service carriers, government-owned telecommunications service providers, radio common carriers, railroads and railways, motor vehicle carriers, and electrical utilities.

The PSC approves, for example, most of the rate hikes that South Carolinians have no choice but to pay.

How does that happen? The utility first requests permission from the PSC to raise rates. Frequently, utilities justify a proposed rate increase by invoking “advance cost recovery,” a process by which utilities are allowed to pass the costs of construction of new facilities on to customers in the form of rate increases. While the PSC considers the request, the Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) acts as the “people’s representative” to counterbalance the utilities.

Who controls the PSC and ORS?
The seven members of the PSC are elected by the General Assembly. Those nominees, however – as well as other candidates for the position – must first be approved by a body known as the Public Utility Review Committee (PURC). State law requires that the PURC be composed entirely of legislators and their appointees. Nine out of the ten board members tasked with nominating the individuals who help determine all South Carolinians’ energy bills owe their positions to two legislative leaders – the Senate Judiciary chairman and the House Speaker. The House Speaker also has an indirect say over the tenth member (the Labor Commerce and Industry Chairman) through his House committee appointments.

**Public Utility Review Committee**

To make matters worse, the Director of the ORS, while technically appointed by the governor, is actually chosen by the PURC. That’s because the PURC nominates one candidate for the governor to consider in making his or her appointment. Hence the PURC nominates both the regulator who deals directly with the utilities (the PSC) and the body that’s supposed to advocate for the consumer’s interest against the utilities.

**Who can you hold accountable?**

**Members of the Public Utility Review Committee**

Sure, South Carolinians are unhappy about the repeated rate hikes to which they’ve been subjected.

Unfortunately, there isn’t a single person or agency to hold accountable for these hikes. The members of the PSC are accountable only to the PURC and 170 members of the General Assembly. Because their accountability is so diffused, it’s unlikely that any effort to express citizens’ grievances could have any effect on PSC policy.

**Why does any of this matter?**

The state body regulating the energy market – including rate hikes – is controlled by legislative leaders. As if that weren’t bad enough, the state entity tasked with representing the people’s interests is controlled by those same legislators. Rate-payers and taxpayers – the vast majority of whom cannot vote for these legislators – therefore have no one to hold accountable. So the next time your rates go up, don’t call state regulators. Call your lawmaker and ask who’s responsible.

**What are new developments in accountability?**

Until recently, there was no movement to restructure any of this. The recent failure of the nuclear reactor construction project – leaving ratepayers for South Carolina’s two largest energy providers on the hook for billions of dollars – has at least brought the topic under scrutiny. The failed project was funded under a process known as advanced cost recovery.
(enabled by the 2007 Base Load Review Act) which allows utilities to finance construction projects through rate hikes. While lawmakers filed two bills this year dealing with advanced cost recovery for utilities, no legislation has been filed to address the root problem: the concentrated, unaccountable power structure that controls the energy sector.

http://www.scpolicycouncil.org/featured/whorunssc?mc_cid=8cd9b9acb4&mc_eid=969c921c0d

Thanks, y'all -

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