

Residents Pack PSC Hearing to Oppose Kentucky Power Rate Increase

More than 75 Kentucky Power customers filled the Perry County Fiscal Court room on Thursday, Dec. 18, as the Kentucky Public Service Commission held a public comment meeting to hear concerns from the region about the utility's proposed rate increase of nearly 15 percent.

The hearing was part of an ongoing case before the commission that is expected to be resolved by June. Residents from across Eastern Kentucky — including several from Letcher County — attended to voice concerns about rising electric bills and their impact on households, businesses, and local governments. Some Letcher County residents traveled to the meeting aboard a tour bus contracted by local attorney Tyler Ward.

PSC Chairwoman Angie Hatton opened the session by explaining the purpose of the meeting and outlining expectations for public participation.

"We're here because we want to hear what people have to say," Hatton said. "We can't answer questions, but we can listen to you and hear your questions. Everything anyone says is on the record, and it's basically like testifying."

Those who signed up to speak were given five minutes each to address the commission.

Perry County Judge-Executive Scott Alexander was the first speaker and thanked those in attendance, stressing the importance of public participation.

"Did we ever believe that we would be standing here talking about power bills being as much as a house payment?" Alexander asked. "None of us thought we would ever see that day, but we're there."

Alexander reflected

on past energy decisions and their long-term consequences for ratepayers.

"I want to step back to 2009, when we started having these discussions about the Big Sandy and switching to the Mitchell and retiring a coal-fired plant and how that was going to do us really good and save us a lot of money," Alexander said. "We all know the results and we have the data now. We know that from 2009 until now, our power rates have gone from some of the best in the country to some of the highest in the country."

He said promises that moving away from coal would lower costs have not materialized.

"We always hear how going from coal to other forms of electricity is going to save us money because of the cost upfront of a coal-fired plant," Alexander said. "But we now have the data to show us that is not true."

Alexander framed the issue within a broader national energy debate.

"We're in a war right now," Alexander said. "We're in a war with China. They call it data centers, I call it artificial intelligence, but there is a race right now to put these centers up, whether we need it or not. There's no better answer, from me, than for us to revisit the revival use of coal."

He closed by urging policymakers to change course.

"We've got to revisit the way we look at energy and electricity and realize that we cannot continue on the path that we've been on, because we can't make it," Alexander said.

State Rep. Chris Fugate, R-Chavies, addressed the commission both as a legislator and a resident.

"I'm here not just as a representative but also as a citizen of the county," Fugate said. "I've lived here all my life. This is a hardship for our people."

"When you talk about fair and just and reasonable — fair to who?" Fugate continued. "Is it fair to a single elderly woman who lives in a single-wide trailer who can't pay her power bill this month? No. Is it fair to the 74-year-old man who lives by himself on a fixed income that has no way of doing any better? No."

Fugate submitted utility bills to the commission to show rate disparities.

"One business uses 56,000 kilowatts in Corbin and their bill was \$5,285," Fugate said. "There is a store here in Hazard that used 44,000 kilowatts and their bill was over \$8,300."

"If you do the math, it's nine cents in Corbin and 18 cents in Hazard," he said. "Is that fair? No, that's not fair."

Fugate concluded by urging the PSC to delay action.

"I beg you once again, do not give them another increase until you at least make them sit down and show us what the actual rate is," Fugate said. "What is the rate now and if you add 15 percent, is that fair?"

Rep. Mitch Whitaker, of Whitesburg, also spoke.

"Electricity is a necessity, not a used car," Whitaker said. "It affects our lives and our livelihoods. It should not be up for negotiation."

Whitaker shared his personal experience. "I have personal knowledge of my own family members who have had to sit in the dark, waiting until they could afford to pay to have their power turned back on," he said.

Jenkins Council Member Rick Damron said repeated rate increases have harmed economic development.

"A company located in the Gateway Industrial Park in Jenkins in 2012 employed 42 people and came here in part because of affordable power," Damron said. "Af-

ter multiple rate increases, that company moved out in 2017 and left the state."

"Kentucky Power has 1,765 shareholders that live all over the world," Damron said. "Why should people here in Kentucky be forced to pay for their investments?"

Gwen Johnson, of Jackhorn, coordinator of Black Sheep Bakery and the Hemphill Community Center, questioned the fairness of the increase.

"What is just and reasonable about another rate increase on our people who cannot afford it?" Johnson asked.

Johnson said the community center installed 70 solar panels but still received a bill of more than \$900 last month.

Virginia Holland, also of Letcher County, said families are being forced to make impossible choices.

"Right now our people can't pay their electric bills," Holland said. "They are forced to make a choice between electricity, medications, or food."

"Please, say no to this increase," she said.

Attorney Tyler Ward challenged the PSC's approach to approving rate increases.

"Everyone has to make

a profit," Ward said. "But not on the backs of people who are least able to afford it."

Kevin Smith, an attorney from London, pointed to AEP's recent financial performance.

"AEP's president told shareholders recently that the latest quarter earnings were the largest ever in its 100-year history," Smith said. "Both cannot be true."

Tawny Acker, of LKLP, said the increase would devastate households living on fixed incomes.

"Many of our clients live on \$967 a month," Acker said.

Local resident Jordan Whitaker urged the commission to consider the human impact.

"I don't care about the politics of it," Whitaker said. "I care about the humanity of it."

State Sen. Brandon Smith closed by urging the PSC to deny the request.

"This has to stop," Smith said. "Send them to us in the legislature, and we will find a solution."

Public comments may also be submitted through the PSC website at psc.ky.gov. The Kentucky Power case number is 2025-00257.

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