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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
OF OREGON
UE 426

In the Matter of
Idaho Power Company,
Request for a General Rate Revision.

**TRANSCRIPT
OF
MARCH 20, 2024
PUBLIC COMMENT
HEARING**

BEFORE: ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE, JOHN MELLGREN

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1 ALJ MELLGREN: All right. Good evening
2 everyone. We will go on the record.

3 My name is John Mellgren, and I am the
4 Administrative Law Judge, or ALJ, assigned to this
5 proceeding.

6 It is 5 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time and we are
7 here for the --

8 COMMISSIONER TAWNEY: *(inaudible)*

9 ALJ MELLGREN: Six p.m. My computer did not
10 update. Apologies.

11 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: *(Inaudible)* Western Idaho.

12 ALJ MELLGREN: It is 6 p.m. Mountain Daylight
13 Time. And we are here for the public comment hearing
14 in UE 426, the docket where the Public Utility
15 Commission of Oregon will consider Idaho Power
16 Company's request for a general rate revision.

17 This evening we will hear your comments on
18 Idaho Power's request for a general -- for a rate
19 increase.

20 Please note that we are recording this session
21 so that we have a record of your comments.

22 I will now turn it over to Commission Chair
23 Megan Decker for some introductory remarks.

24 CHAIR DECKER: Hi everyone. Good evening.
25 Thanks for being here. I'm Megan Decker and I'm the

1 Chair of the Oregon Public Utility Commission. I've
2 been serving as a Commissioner since 2017.

3 And tonight I'm joined by my colleague,
4 Commissioner Letha Tawney, who I can (*inaudible -*
5 *audio cuts out*).

6 COMMISSIONER TAWNEY: Thanks so much for
7 coming out. It's lovely to see everybody. It's so
8 nice to be here and be able to see real humans and not
9 squares and Zoom screens. So thanks for coming out.

10 CHAIR DECKER: So, Commissioner Tawney has
11 been serving with the Commission since 2018.

12 And we do have a third Commissioner,
13 Commissioner Les Perkins who just joined us on Monday.
14 He's getting his feet under him and wished he could be
15 here. He'll obviously have access to the recording of
16 the public comments tonight, and will be able to
17 participate in the decision.

18 So, that's who we are. And like Commissioner
19 Tawney said, I really appreciate people coming out
20 tonight to provide public feedback on what's really
21 the first filing that Idaho Power's made in a long
22 time to update their general costs of doing business.

23 We know, and we've been hearing loud and clear
24 that with the rising costs of everything for consumers
25 these rate cases are feeling like a last straw, really

1 feeling like the pinch, and a difficult thing for
2 people to accommodate in their budgets for their home
3 or their business. And that's why we're here tonight
4 is to hear how this is affecting people, but also to
5 hear your thoughts on the utility's performance, and
6 on where we should be asking (*inaudible*) questions in
7 this rate case about the utility's ability to reduce,
8 defer or eliminate costs.

9 We can't ignore the rising costs -- realities
10 that utilities also are facing, and we can't -- and
11 then I don't think we want to ask them to stop
12 investing in safe and reliable utility infrastructure.
13 But, like I said, we can ask tough questions about the
14 costs that they (*inaudible*) on to ratepayers, and
15 that's where your comments come in. Our Staff uses
16 them to help them prepare their analysis, and their
17 recommendations to the Commission in this rate case.
18 We really value the input that we get from folks, and
19 appreciate you being here tonight.

20 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you, Chair Decker.

21 So, before we begin hearing comments from the
22 public, I will provide a brief overview of the process
23 for the Commissions's review of Idaho Power's rate
24 increase request, and then Commission Staff will
25 provide a brief presentation on the request itself and

1 Staff's role in this proceeding.

2 Today's public comment hearing is one step in
3 many in these proceedings. After today's hearing we
4 will prepare a transcript of the comments received,
5 and Commission Staff will file them with their opening
6 testimony along with any other comments received. All
7 comments will be considered by the Commission along
8 with other evidence provided by Idaho Power Commission
9 Staff and interveners in deciding whether and to what
10 extent to grant Idaho Power's request. In making its
11 decision, the Commission will balance the interest of
12 utility customers and the utility itself. The
13 Commission could decide to grant the request in full,
14 or with changes, or deny the request.

15 In addition to today's public comment hearing,
16 the Commission will hold an evidentiary hearing on
17 June 25th, and will hear oral arguments from the
18 parties on August 29th. The Commission anticipates
19 issuing a Final Order in this docket by October 2024,
20 and any new rates would become effective on October
21 15th, 2024.

22 Please note that if you want to provide the
23 Commission with written comments, you should do so by
24 April 3rd, 2024. And information on how to do so can
25 be found on the Commission's website.

1 I'll now turn things over to Melissa Nottingham
2 with Commission Staff for a brief presentation.

3 MS. NOTTINGHAM: Thank you. Okay. Thank you.
4 I can't (*inaudible*). Yeah, I can't (*inaudible*) three
5 things and (*Inaudible*). Okay. Thank you very much.

6 My name is Melissa Nottingham and I'm the
7 manager of Consumer Services at the Oregon Public
8 Utility Commission.

9 Part of my role is to gather public comments on
10 the various dockets that are before the Commission.
11 Tonight I am going to present a very high level review
12 of Idaho's general rate case with a focus on
13 residential customers. The information that I am
14 providing is the company's proposal, and as part of
15 the process, like Judge Mellgren was stating, Staff
16 will be reviewing the company's request to ensure that
17 it is reasonable and necessary for providing reliable
18 electric service to Idaho Power's Oregon customers.

19 So this is the first general rate case that
20 Idaho Power has filed since 2011. For the residential
21 customers the current rate is -- the basic charge is
22 eight dollars, the average customer in the Oregon
23 territory uses about 11.64 kilowatt-hours a month
24 giving an average residential bill of \$139.92.

25 The proposed rate increase that's currently

1 before the Commission would add \$10.7 million to their
2 general -- to their base rates. How this scenario
3 could play out for residential customers, basic charge
4 would increase to \$15.00, the same customer using
5 11.64 kilowatt-hours would have a bill of \$172.29 with
6 an increase of approximately 23.14%.

7 Now, this average that I'm giving you is really
8 based on how much power a person uses or how much
9 power the home uses, and kind of take that in
10 consideration and also recognizing the diversity usage
11 within Idaho Power's Oregon service territory. We
12 tried to break out and provide an example of what the
13 potential increase would be based on geographic area
14 and also by the type of residence.

15 So, in this slide we're looking at, so for
16 example, in Baker/Harney their average is around a
17 little lower than the state average at 11.37, so the
18 potential increase to their bill would go from \$133.62
19 to \$164.43 or 23%. Mobile homes have a higher than
20 average usage coming in at 12.05 and they could
21 potentially be looking at an increase of approximately
22 23.1 -- oh, I'm sorry, I read the wrong one -- 22.89
23 for mobile homes in Malheur County, outlying areas has
24 a higher average usage and they could potentially see
25 an increase of 22% going from \$178.33 to \$217.74.

1 Now, this slide kind of breaks out when we're
2 talking about the base rates, which is what we're
3 taking into consideration with the general rate case.
4 If we look at the 10.7 million and the impact if we
5 were just looking at that piece alone for our
6 residential customers, the increase could be
7 potentially 26.76%, but when we're looking at the net
8 impact, which would include additional riders, for
9 example, there's -- on the slide schedule 56 is a
10 power cost adjustment, which is a separate annual
11 docket that's filed every year to align with changing
12 gas prices and the elect volatility and the electric
13 -- and the power market. If we look at the total
14 impact of the bill including those riders, we're
15 looking at -- that's where we're getting the 23.14%
16 for our average customer.

17 So, the question is what is driving the rate
18 increase? The primary cost driver is capital
19 investments. These are the projects the company
20 undertakes to either build new infrastructure or to do
21 upgrades to existing infrastructure. This represents
22 approximately 13.2% of the increase. Some examples of
23 that in the rate case are hydro production, turbine
24 refurbishment, new generation has been brought online
25 since 2011, increase in solar generation, and also 40-

1 megawatt batteries, storage facility.

2 The next tranche, largest tranche is the
3 operation, or O&M, and maintenance, and these costs
4 encompass the daily operations of the utility
5 including things like labor and maintenance, routine
6 repairs, insurance and administrative costs.

7 And I'm pointing out that the deductions for
8 this -- the revenue is from tax -- there was a
9 reduction from tax credits and also savings the
10 company has managed to make in their operating
11 revenue, so there is a reduction there of 3.1 million,
12 and that's where we're getting our final number of
13 10.7 million.

14 So, to review Idaho Power's proposal, the
15 Public Utility Staff employs experts from a variety of
16 areas. It would be an understatement to say that
17 general rate cases are very complex. So, for example,
18 the company must demonstrate their spending is
19 necessary, prudent, and reasonable, and in order for
20 Staff to make those kind of determinations, we have to
21 employ accountants, financial analysts, economists,
22 engineers, and other -- other experts in their fields,
23 because in order to make a determination of reasonable
24 (*inaudible*) will have to be technical analysis,
25 prudent economic review, and also how are the costs

1 being distributed among the different types of
2 customers.

3 We also work closely with the Department of
4 Justice to write legal briefs and guide us to ensure
5 that we're meeting all of the statutes and regulatory
6 requirements. But bottom line, the objective is to
7 ensure the electric rates are necessary, the proposed
8 increase.

9 Okay. Next steps. So, today we reviewed the
10 -- the next steps are -- we're going to analyze the
11 power -- the filing, Staff will be filing their
12 opening testimony on March 25th to address the specific
13 issues that are brought up, and at that point they'll
14 review testimony of interveners and, if necessary,
15 develop settlement decisions. And like I said
16 earlier, we work closely with the DOJ as far as cross-
17 examining witnesses, submitting legal briefs and
18 making oral arguments.

19 I strongly encourage everyone to follow the
20 docket at the www.Oregon.gov/PUC.

21 I appreciate the opportunity to present this
22 information to you this evening. If you have any
23 questions or any other issues that you want to bring
24 to Consumer Services' attention Deanna is here and we
25 can take names, and we'll followup with you if you

1 have any other issues.

2 Thank you.

3 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

4 So we'll now hear public comments on Idaho
5 Power's request. So, let me just go over the process
6 real quick that we'll be using tonight.

7 This is an opportunity for you to offer your
8 comments on Idaho Power's rate request. The
9 Commissioners will be listening carefully, but will
10 not be answering questions or responding to individual
11 comments tonight.

12 We will be here until about 7:00, but we'll
13 strive to hear from everyone who is in line to speak
14 at that time.

15 So when called to speak, please speak slowly
16 and clearly, and state your name for the record. Your
17 comments are being recorded and eventually transcribed
18 for use in this docket, and we want to make sure that
19 they are clearly heard.

20 Some of you signed the speaker form, and so
21 I'll be using that first, and then we'll just allow
22 people to come to the microphone to provide their
23 comments. There's no time limit on your comments, but
24 please be brief and give us the high level points of
25 what you have to say. If you have prepared written

1 remarks, we ask that you please email those in and
2 summarize them for the record this evening.

3 So, with that we will start with our list.

4 Balbina Torres, did you want to speak?

5 BALBINA TORRES: I think I have written
6 remarks so I'll share them --

7 ALJ MELLGREN: Okay.

8 BALBINA TORRES: -- by email.

9 ALJ MELLGREN: Okay. Great. Thank you.
10 Senator Lynn Findley.

11 SENATOR FINDLEY: Thank you.

12 Chair Decker, I want to thank you for coming to
13 Eastern Oregon. I -- it's truly a pleasure that you
14 come and listen to us.

15 This is a huge deal for Malheur County.
16 Malheur County is the fourth county in Oregon, we're
17 heavily dependent on agriculture for our well-being,
18 and this rate increase is a significant impact to
19 agriculture, 36%, 27% -- nearly 27% for residential.

20 I want to encourage you to explore with the
21 Community In Action and other public assist agencies
22 that keep running out of money and paying power bills
23 for low income people. We have a tremendous number of
24 low income. Most of the cities exceed the low income
25 threshold for poverty. *(Inaudible)* programs to pay

1 these energy assistance run out of money on a regular
2 basis, so I -- while I understand the need for a rate
3 increase, they haven't done it in a long time, that's
4 good, but I think we need to make sure that it's
5 palatable for constituents or residents of Malheur
6 County.

7 I have received several emails and letters from
8 my constituents that expressed a great concern: "How
9 can I do this? How are we going to pay our bills?"
10 Because they do not know.

11 Irrigation -- the agriculture community and
12 through the TMDL, the total maximum daily load of
13 rivers and streams have pushed flood irrigation away
14 to pump irrigation -- pressurized irrigation. So
15 we've pushed irrigators into a more expensive model,
16 and the fact that now to say "Okay, we made you buy
17 all these pumps, we made you do all this improvements,
18 now we're going to raise your rates." That's kind of
19 a *(inaudible)*.

20 So, I encourage you to look at that as we go
21 through this. I think you're going to hear from some
22 great folks on exactly what those impacts are.

23 I think it was last fall -- early last fall
24 when Idaho Power had -- there was a docket open on
25 Idaho Power on their renewable energy support on how

1 they would -- were walking away from some of their
2 PURPA projects, from their renewable energy projects.
3 That wasn't received as well as it could have been,
4 and the fact that we keep -- as Oregon's renewable
5 energy goals and targets are to move towards more
6 renewable projects, it didn't seem that Idaho Power,
7 through that process, was being that supportive of
8 those projects in Oregon. I'd encourage you to look
9 at that.

10 I'm excited to hear about a (*inaudible*) battery
11 storage system that they have in there. For the most
12 part, Idaho Power has moved out of all services
13 facilities in Malheur County. All the communities
14 used to have Idaho Power offices (*inaudible*), they no
15 longer have them. Those are all located (*inaudible*).

16 So, and Idaho Power has been a great partner.
17 They've been a great community supporter. I don't
18 want to let you think for a second that they're not,
19 but they're not the same Idaho Power that was in every
20 community and participated with stuff. I don't think
21 that as you -- as you talk with some of our folks that
22 Idaho Power embraces the renewable portfolio for
23 Oregon as the House Bill 2021 requested.

24 Just Monday, this week, I attended a meeting
25 and listened to the Idaho Power folks talk about their

1 wildfire mitigation issues, and -- and I was perplexed
2 because they showed a map of polygons in Malheur
3 County that were high fire danger. And I looked at
4 that and I thought, hmm, wow, I spent 32 years in
5 wildland fire, so I know a little bit about fire
6 stuff. They were irrigated farm grounds. Said, "This
7 is our high risk area." How can this be? How can --
8 how can irrigated farm ground be a high risk fire
9 area? And if you're putting resources in to protect a
10 crop of beets, sugar beets, I don't think you need to.

11 So, I found that was kind of interesting that
12 they were putting their stock in -- you know, were
13 doing the wildfire mitigation stuff, but it doesn't --
14 there's no reality to it.

15 I did not have an opportunity to push back on
16 several of their comments because it wasn't the right
17 time. But I do think if some of the rate increase is
18 due to wildfire mitigation, I believe we should dig
19 into that a little more because I do not think it's a
20 valid concern.

21 So, I appreciate you coming. I will provide
22 comments for you, and I will try to give a summary of
23 the constituents that have reported to me with their
24 concerns. I was kind of hoping -- you know, I sent
25 out a newsletter the other day to a whole lot of

1 folks, and I thought there would be more people here.
2 I was kind of disappointed they're not. It's a big
3 deal when you come, it is certainly appreciated.

4 Thank you so much.

5 CHAIR DECKER: Thank you.

6 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

7 CHAIR DECKER: We appreciate your service,
8 too.

9 ALJ MELLGREN: Roger Findley.

10 ROGER FINDLEY: Good evening. I'm Roger
11 Findley. I reside at 3535 Butte Drive in Ontario.

12 Actually, if you draw a *(inaudible)* between
13 *(inaudible)* and Ontario, then go to *(inaudible)* that's
14 *(inaudible)*.

15 Some people asked if Senator Findley is my
16 cousin. Yes, he's my *(inaudible)* cousin -- younger
17 cousin, okay, much, much younger.

18 *(Laughing)*

19 ROGER FINDLEY: And I like to -- when he does
20 good things I like to say, "Well, yeah, I taught him
21 all those things." When he does bad things, "I don't
22 know where he learned this." So, anyway.

23 So, I'm a third generation farmer. I farm on
24 the same property that my grandfather and my dad
25 *(inaudible)* sagebrush in 1937. They were victims of

1 the dust bowl, and they came here from northwest --
2 northeast Colorado, and they lived their first year in
3 a tent on the place, in the shepherd's tent. And
4 they used sagebrush to keep warm, cook with, and so
5 we've had the farm for -- well, in 13 more years we'll
6 have a Century Farm, and that's our goal is to keep it
7 in the family to get the Century designation.

8 So, I'm a third generation farmer. I'm hoping
9 that we get a fourth generation of Findleys coming on,
10 but nobody seems to be too interested in that right
11 now.

12 So the farm consists of, (*inaudible*) 160 acres
13 and a 93 acre water right from the (*inaudible*)
14 Irrigation District. And then my dad, being the kind
15 of person he was, wasn't satisfied with just 93 acres,
16 and so he developed the land above the canal, and we
17 have two (*inaudible*) on that. So we irrigate about
18 250 acres more land above the canal, 93 acres below
19 the canal, and we have two deep German pumps that pump
20 water (*inaudible*), one's 100 horsepower, and the other
21 one's a 200 horsepower motor.

22 So, Idaho Power and I, you know, we've got a
23 really great relationship. Idaho Power's been a great
24 facility to work with. I just can't stand the rate
25 increase. So, last year just on the one and 200

1 horsepower water pump, my power bill was \$24,462. So
2 that amounts to, on the land it irrigates, and it
3 irrigates 160 acres. It irrigates -- I mean, that
4 amounts to \$153 an acre. Now, the (*inaudible*) water,
5 which is just right across the canal from where I
6 irrigate (*inaudible*), the water comes to about \$75 an
7 acre. So, my water's twice as expensive as the
8 irrigation water from the Owyhee Canal.

9 Now, I know Idaho Power said that they have not
10 had a rate increase since whatever (*inaudible*).
11 That's not exactly true. I mean, they haven't had an
12 official rating, (*inaudible*), that's true, but there's
13 other ways of increasing the bill.

14 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Yeah.

15 RICHARD FINDLEY: Okay? And you all know
16 that. And my bill continues to go up every year with
17 new things coming on the bill. I wrote down -- so at
18 first there's a (*inaudible*) charge, now for
19 residential (*inaudible*) irrigation \$16. We used to
20 have a charge for Boardman, (*inaudible*) that's gone
21 away now. But we have one on (*inaudible*). PM -- P --
22 excuse me -- PN -- PCAM. I don't know what that
23 stands for, but we're billed for it. We also have
24 what's called an annual power cost update, and this
25 year for irrigation that was about 1.7 cents a

1 kilowatt hour. We are getting charged for energy
2 efficiency. We're getting charged for solar,
3 *(inaudible)* Oregon solar. So there's a number of
4 different things *(inaudible)* if you see rate, but it
5 increased the power bill.

6 So I looked back on my records, and in 2019, my
7 power bill was right at \$32,000 for that 160 acres.
8 So, I did some things to lower my costs of irrigating.
9 I put in a lot of solar, okay? Well, as a matter of
10 fact I've been putting in solar since 2010. I knew
11 for me to continue to irrigate, *(inaudible)* going up
12 even back in 2010, I was going to have to do something
13 to supplement my income. So, I wrote a *(inaudible)*
14 grant with USDA and I put in my first 14 kilowatt
15 solar. That was 2010. When my power bill got up to
16 \$32,000 in 2019, I decided I needed *(inaudible)* put in
17 some more solar, which I did. And so now I produce
18 about 50 -- I've got 50 kilowatts solar that produces
19 power two months of the year, *(inaudible)* irrigating,
20 you know, five months out of the year, so seven months
21 out of the year is going into the piggy bank for me,
22 so those first couple months are about free.

23 Now, I'd like to put in more solar because I'm
24 going to have to do something if my rates go up 35%.
25 I'm not sure how I'm going to be able to stay in

1 business with those wells by the canal if I get a 35%
2 increase in rates. So, I was thinking about, well,
3 maybe it's time to invest in more solar, but Idaho
4 Power also sent out a letter that said, "Well, we're
5 changing the net (*inaudible*) with irrigators." And,
6 you know, they're grandfathering my existing solar in,
7 but I can't increase the (*inaudible*) on that meter.
8 All I can increase is 10%, but if I increase over 10%
9 I go into a different schedule, and that (*inaudible*).
10 And I haven't looked at the new schedule, but I can
11 assure you it's not as good as (*inaudible*) because
12 they wouldn't be (*inaudible*), right? They're not
13 going to give me a better deal, they're going to give
14 me a worse deal. And so I'm kind of caught between a
15 rock and a hard place as far as what I'm going to do
16 as far as irrigating goes.

17 I know that you mentioned that our costs --
18 well, Idaho Power's costs are going up, but so are
19 farmers' costs going up. We all know what fuel,
20 fertilizer, repairs, new equipment have done over the
21 last few years. I looked on the internet before I
22 came in here tonight, wheat prices are down 20% in the
23 last year, (*inaudible*) prices 25%, alfalfa's down over
24 50% from what it was last year. And I grow wheat,
25 alfalfa, my renter grows a little bit of corn, and so

1 it's a financial bind for us. I'm just not sure how
2 we're going to be able to survive with the costs going
3 up and Idaho Power going up.

4 So, I would conclude by saying thank you very
5 much for coming over. We know that it's a long way
6 between here and Salem, Portland? Yeah. So, but the
7 highway does go both ways. We appreciate you coming
8 over, saving us a trip over, and it's been a long time
9 since we've had the Oregon PUC here to grace us, so
10 thank you very much.

11 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

12 And so that's the end of the list, and so if
13 anyone else would like to give a comment you're
14 welcome to come up to the mic.

15 PAUL STEIN: I'll step right up there.

16 ALJ MELLGREN: All right. So, please state
17 your name for the record when you begin your comments.

18 PAUL STEIN: Paul Stein. 24871 (*inaudible*)
19 Boulevard in (*inaudible*), Oregon. Been there 70
20 years. This is the Mountain Time Zone.

21 But they -- one of these guys triggered
22 something for me when they talked about the Idaho
23 Power people being part of the community. And this
24 good looking lady behind me, her husband is my oldest
25 son, and the Idaho Power -- I don't know what you

1 called it back then -- the district -- the district
2 manager, I guess the (*inaudible*) manager -- anyhow, he
3 was such a part of our community. He put the lights
4 up and helped sponsor all that at the football field.
5 He was a fabulous, fabulous coach, and he beat me more
6 than I beat him, because he was a lot smarter than me.
7 But he was such a big part of our community. Then
8 they moved him to Ontario, and then to the district
9 office in (*inaudible*). Five or six years ago he had
10 moved down to Lehi, Utah, and they asked me to speak
11 at his funeral.

12 My point with this is, is they were part of the
13 community. Back when he was here, I built my first
14 onion storage, and I didn't have to fork out any money
15 because they said, "We're going to let you work this
16 off." That doesn't happen with my second, my third
17 one, and my son's got huge storages. We've -- between
18 my two sons and myself, we farm a lot of ground, and
19 it's heavy row crop ground.

20 I am also -- part of the reason that we don't
21 have a lot of people here today is because all the
22 farmers are out planting, and I jumped off a tractor
23 because I thought this was important.

24 I used to be the onion president for Malheur
25 County, and so I'm speaking on behalf now of Cory Maag

1 (*phonetic*) who took my place when I retired a couple
2 years ago.

3 Our storages alone, plus all of our drip
4 equipment -- so I have -- just me, myself, and I
5 couldn't even tell you how many Cameron's got -- I
6 have three pumps on the Snake River, and then I have
7 nine that are filler stations that have to have the
8 same horsepower as what we've got pumping out of the
9 Snake River, and then the majority of our ground is
10 all under irrigation districts, the old Owyhee and the
11 Owyhee Irrigation District. It's confusing when you
12 say both.

13 And another thing that I'm really worried
14 about, I have ten employees, one of them's a widow,
15 one of them is -- I have another one that's a young
16 widow, and you start throwing these increases out to
17 residential people, it's a huge, huge hit to these
18 people, especially, I'm gonna say, older people who
19 are on a fixed income, and I think we need to really
20 think about that now.

21 I will tell you, I can't survive without Idaho
22 Power. Let's just face it. I still have onions in
23 the onion storage, and when it's 73 degrees outside
24 it's going ca-ching, ca-ching, ca-ching, but I can't
25 survive without them, and pumping our water. And I've

1 known them to be wonderful people. So, I don't want
2 in any way, shape, or form to have you think that we
3 don't care about Idaho Power, because we do, and they
4 are important to us, but as has been said, said
5 (*inaudible*) county and all of Oregon, and I have two
6 and a half miles of river frontage where I once sat
7 over in Salem testifying, I have two and a half miles
8 of river frontage where I'm only 800 feet away from a
9 friendly agricultural state in Idaho, and I see
10 Christie Brinkley -- now, none of you are old enough
11 to know, she's 70 years old, and used to be a model --
12 and I turned around -- nobody would be old enough here
13 on this one either -- I turned around and (*inaudible*)
14 standing next to me. And they got it over there,
15 there's enough old guys.

16 But I appreciate you being here and it's --
17 this is really important that we -- we take this very
18 seriously. Thank you.

19 CHAIR DECKER: Thank you.

20 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

21 IRENE GILBERT: Chair Decker, and members of
22 the council, my name's Irene Gilbert, I reside at 2310
23 Adams Avenue in La Grande, Oregon, and I represent
24 myself as an individual and also the public interest
25 when it comes to issues with energy.

1 As an individual, I'm impacted because I own
2 rentals, and some are to the lower income folks, so
3 energy is a big concern to them.

4 Also, I have some farmland, and we carry a
5 contract on a sporting goods business, so when
6 utilities go up, the person who has that contract is
7 paying more for his energy, and that affects his
8 bottom line, and his bottom line affects our bottom
9 line because of him needing to succeed for -- we
10 continue having that contract affected.

11 As far as the public interest, I've been
12 involved with EFSAT (*phonetic*) for over 10 years,
13 actually about a dozen years. I was legal research
14 analyst for Friends of the Grand Ronde Valley roughly
15 10 years ago. I also have -- I'm co-chair of
16 (*inaudible*) which is a non-profit looking out for the
17 concerns of citizens. And part of the reason for
18 (*inaudible*) part of our mission is to make sure that
19 -- that property owners and citizens are treated
20 fairly when it comes to energy. And what -- what sort
21 of prompted the beginning of our organization was the
22 fact that there are an awful lot of people in Eastern
23 Oregon who are not comfortable with dealing with
24 bureaucracy, who do not have the experience dealing
25 with them, who are intimidated by you folks. As it

1 happens, I've worked in Salem for many years within
2 the bureaucracy and dealing with rules and
3 regulations, and what they mean and how they actually
4 impact people. So -- so, as co-chair, I do what I can
5 to read the fine print and figure out what it really
6 means in terms of the impact on people.

7 When I read over the application for Idaho
8 Power, what I found was that there's a lack of
9 information identifying what the actual costs are and
10 impacts to people within Oregon. They used a lot of
11 data for their full customer base, which is over
12 600,000 people, but only about 20,000 of them reside
13 in Malheur and Baker County, which is where you folks
14 are -- are looking at the rate structure.

15 I also found that in Idaho there's -- 600,000
16 people are being asked to assume -- I guess the final
17 approval was like 5.9 million dollars of costs during
18 this rate evaluation. It amounted to something under
19 \$100 per person of (*inaudible*) costs. They're asking
20 for 10 point whatever -- two million from the 20,000
21 Oregon customers, and that amounts to them assuming
22 over \$500 each in the assumed cost of this -- this
23 rate.

24 And one thing that I'm very concerned with is
25 the (*inaudible*) ruling says that -- that benefits are

1 going to dictate basically what the expenses are to
2 customers of utilities, and so I don't see in the
3 application where Idaho Power has identified what are
4 the benefits that are going to come to the Oregon
5 people that are justifying the amount of increase that
6 they're asking for. A lot of information (*inaudible*)
7 a lot of information about their total costs. They
8 talk about things like a 23% increase in their
9 customer base, and in Oregon in Malheur and Baker
10 Counties the -- actually, the population has gone down
11 in the last couple of years. And so saying that a 23%
12 increase in their customers is requiring this increase
13 in rates doesn't -- doesn't cut mustard.

14 The other thing about Oregon is -- and I'm sure
15 you guys are aware of this -- the actual per customer
16 use of this energy in Oregon has gone down. So, in
17 the past, an increase in customers has not resulted in
18 increasing energy use because of the reduction in --
19 in our effective use of (*inaudible*) energy and locally
20 generated energy.

21 And one of the people mentioned the fact that
22 Idaho Power is not a supporter of locally generated
23 energy, and I think you'd find that the bulk of our
24 people that we represent, there's about 1,000
25 individuals and five nonprofits, they're a part of the

1 (*inaudible*) nonprofit, and, um... I've lost my train
2 of thought. I'm sorry.

3 Anyway, we are not anti-energy. We recognize
4 there's a need for energy. What we do believe is that
5 for utilities to be justifying the cost of new
6 developments, they need to be supporting in a very
7 aggressive way locally generated energy. They need to
8 be supporting (*inaudible*), they need to be supporting
9 battery storage, and they've actually received a
10 reduction in the amount their paying customers who are
11 putting together locally generated solar energy.

12 Now, I -- don't quote me on this, because it's
13 been awhile since I read the information, but at one
14 point I read that in Idaho the -- fully a quarter of
15 the energy needs in the state could be dealt with by
16 aggressive use of rooftop solar. So, now you have
17 people who are saying, "We can't afford to put it in
18 because the rates are so low," and yet they're asking
19 for new developments -- expensive developments
20 (*inaudible*) infrastructure that are going to support
21 having them be the sole source for energy that should
22 be getting generated locally. So that's a concern.

23 As far as wildfire costs go, most of my
24 knowledge is based on a lot of study about the
25 transmission infrastructures at Boardman-Hemingway.

1 And interesting that someone said that they're saying
2 that beet fields are now a high risk -- a wildfire
3 risk, because in the Boardman to Hemingway
4 transmission line, they found that there were no high
5 risk areas during the entire route of the transmission
6 line going through Oregon, and there are only two
7 areas that they called yellow or, you know, sort of
8 high wildfire risk. So, how they can say that this
9 money for wildfire mitigation is going to be
10 benefitting the people in Malheur and Baker County is
11 kind of confusing to me.

12 And so I really feel that this whole
13 application -- Idaho Power needs to really tell you
14 folks what is it that they're providing to these
15 Oregon customers that's justifying the amount of money
16 that they're asking for. Not what they're saying it
17 costs for (*inaudible*), because if they're looking at
18 an average, then Oregon customers right now are being
19 asked, according to their request, to fund roughly
20 just under 20% of their total stated increased value
21 in the information that they provided.

22 There's -- Oregon customers are only like 3.2%
23 of their total customer base, that doesn't pan out in
24 terms of what FERC requirements are, or equitable
25 treatment of people just because they live in Oregon

1 compared to those that live in Idaho.

2 Let's see. I'm (*inaudible*) here. Anyway, we
3 shouldn't be subsidizing -- subsidizing Idaho
4 customers by Oregon.

5 Okay. Another thing that I'm just kind of
6 noting here -- I did provide two sets of fairly
7 extensive written comments to you folks, so I hope you
8 read that because there is a lot of detail in there
9 that obviously I'm not going to be sharing right now.
10 But one of the things in the budget that just irks
11 many of us is that Idaho Power is saying they should
12 be receiving a 10.4% annual -- annual return on
13 investment for the equity, and a 7.8% return on their
14 capital. Well, the people here are not receiving
15 10.8% (*inaudible*) or benefit from their farming
16 operations. They're not receiving 7.8% annual return
17 on anything that I'm aware of that is -- is being done
18 in this area. And so to be equitable it seems to me
19 that any (*inaudible*) for this company should be
20 consistent with the rate of return that the customers
21 in Oregon are getting on their own investments.

22 And Idaho Power's touted oftentimes that for
23 the last dozen years, (*inaudible*) stockholders have
24 received (*inaudible*) their distribution of benefits.
25 Now, they're projecting that that increase will --

1 that will continue to happen, that they will continue
2 to be operating their stock (*inaudible*) more return on
3 their investment. How can they do that when these
4 people who are going to be paying larger utility
5 bills, those bills are coming right off the top of
6 their costs. I mean, I've done farming, when you lose
7 money, you're not losing it down the line, you're
8 losing it right off the top of your net income, and so
9 every dollar that they take is taking a dollar
10 directly out of the profits of these people that are
11 here concerned about this rate increase.

12 Another -- another thing that kind of strikes
13 me is -- and again, looking at the kinds of
14 information that they provide to different agencies
15 through different processes is not the same. Idaho
16 Power has told the Energy Facility Siting Council that
17 they are so financially stable that they should not
18 have to carry a bond in case they were to default on
19 restoring the site of the transmission line because
20 there is no possibility of them having a financial
21 problem due to wildfire, or, you know, other -- any
22 kind of financial problem. At the same time, they're
23 sending you folks an application that says they have
24 all these risks that are happening. They're paying
25 more interest. They're paying -- you know, their

1 credit rating's gone down. They can't access funds.
2 (*inaudible*). I mean, you read the same thing that I
3 did. So, either they are so financially stable that
4 they don't even have to have a bond to protect these
5 Oregon citizens from having to restore a facility that
6 they built, or they really are close to bankruptcy or
7 -- or going to be if you folks don't give them a bunch
8 of money. Doesn't make sense.

9 I just -- I just covered that. I'm trying to
10 do that. I think I did most of this.

11 Oh, another thing that concerned me is Idaho
12 Power compared their need for increased rates with
13 PacifiCorp and Pacific Power rather than comparing
14 their need for -- for income with Idaho Power in
15 Idaho. Why they would be using energy companies that
16 are -- have a way different kind of customer base and
17 area of influence, and everything about them is
18 different than Idaho Power. And Idaho Power has a
19 perfect group to compare with and that is their own
20 customers in Idaho who just received, what, a 5.4%
21 increase in their rate?

22 There's -- there's more information in my
23 written material. I hope you take careful note of it
24 and know that I am here representing the public
25 interest, I'm here representing myself as an

1 individual, and I've done a whole lot of research. I
2 spent a lot of time drafting this. I'm motivated by
3 assuring that people are ethical in their dealing with
4 the citizens, and that they're fair. And I haven't
5 felt that oftentimes Idaho Power has been -- has met
6 that maybe high standard that I set for myself in
7 dealing with people.

8 Thank you.

9 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

10 KENNETH JANSEN: Good evening. I'm Kenneth
11 Jansen. I live at 2436 11th Avenue East in Vale,
12 Oregon. I'm a farmer, been doing it for the last 30
13 some years. I'm also a board member of the Oregon
14 Irrigation Members Association, which got together
15 back in 2011 to -- on the last rate increase, and it
16 looks like we need to get fired up to deal with this
17 one here as well.

18 I farm with my wife. We farm 1,000 acres,
19 almost all deep well, we have over 700 horsepower, so
20 I'm not going to give you the dollar amounts, you can
21 just do (*inaudible*) math and you can multiply it by
22 quite a bit.

23 The 37% -- 36% rate increase in irrigation went
24 way above the other large power I saw was under 10%.
25 I don't quite understand why the big guys get a small

1 rate increase, it should be all flat. I'm not going
2 to say that I need less than the residential, I think
3 it should be more flat. I know some of the data Idaho
4 Power's used in the past shows that irrigators were
5 the bad expensive people.

6 I also want to make sure for the engineers and
7 mathematicians who are looking at their data, they
8 should not just use the year 2023 for the data
9 analysis because that was a very wet year. We got
10 three inch rain events that we've never seen. We
11 irrigated two-thirds/three-fourths of what we normally
12 do because that was a wet year, got a lot of rain in
13 the summer, monsoons you guys all know what happened
14 last year. So, that would make us not use so much
15 power, so we look more like we're a bad person, with
16 costs more expensive to service us. Go back, look at
17 several years, take '22, take '21 that were dryer
18 years, more average years. So, if you're trying to
19 pinpoint why we're the bad guys and why we get 37%,
20 it's going to be very difficult for us.

21 You know, why, as an irrigator, just across the
22 Snake River do I, in Oregon, have to pay way more per
23 kilowatt-hour than the Idaho farmers do? I mean,
24 we're at a disadvantage already because of the
25 regulations that Oregon has, and this is going to make

1 it even worse.

2 So I'll be short, and thank you for your time,
3 and please don't give us a 37% rate increase, or we're
4 going to be looking for another occupation.

5 Also, I do have a whole bunch of solar on my
6 farm, and I know there's a solar docket, and
7 (*inaudible*) put solar in, as Roger said, it's going to
8 go way down with the new rules you guys are also
9 dealing with.

10 The letter I got, it was kind of interesting,
11 they were going to grandfather everything after a date
12 that you could not -- they didn't give us advanced
13 notice of this date, because there's a lot of us that
14 would like to put more solar in, but all of a sudden,
15 no, the date happened last week. "Sorry, you're gonna
16 get the new rules which are only half as good as the
17 -- or less than half as good as the old rules were."
18 So, that would kind of be punishing.

19 And also, one other quick detail, they did not
20 state what they're doing with the Oregon solar
21 program. I took quite a bit of the Oregon solar
22 program that came in 10/12 years ago, it doesn't
23 appear that I'm going to get grandfathered in when
24 those expire in three to four years, and I'd sure like
25 to be grandfathered in under the old rules, because

1 I'm going to get thrown out of the system and have to
2 reapply for a new system in three/four years when
3 those expire, and I would sure like to get those
4 systems grandfathered that we went through the -- the
5 pioneer years like Roger did.

6 So, anyway, thank you very much.

7 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

8 Is there anyone else who would like to provide
9 comment this evening?

10 BALBINA TORRES: My name is Balbina Torres and
11 I live here in Ontario. I'm also a customer for Idaho
12 Power. And I work with Community in Action, we did an
13 energy assistance department (*inaudible*) program, and
14 I -- and we have a really good communication, really
15 good relationship with Idaho Power as well, they've
16 been a lot of help.

17 But regarding the residential increase, you
18 know, speaking for myself, for my family, you know, we
19 have a lot of seasonal workers in the area, which was
20 mentioned earlier, which means a lot of the certain
21 time of the period of the year they have no income at
22 all. So, I know this increase will affect them, you
23 know, a lot as well.

24 And I know my mom, you know, she's a seasonal
25 worker and she tries to save up for whenever she

1 doesn't have income, and with this increase, you know,
2 it will make a big dent on her finance.

3 Then I also, with like the energy assistance
4 (*inaudible*) program, you know, we've seen many large
5 bills, and sometimes a standard payment, it may cover
6 like the past due amount they have, but there's times
7 when they have a really high past due, and just the
8 standard payment alone sometimes can't cover an amount
9 needed to reconnect services.

10 So, you know, or -- and I was just thinking,
11 you know, I know everything has to go up sometime, but
12 maybe that \$30 -- or 27% increase all at once may be
13 too high all at once. I don't know, you know, maybe a
14 plan on doing that increase just a little slower, not
15 all at once.

16 Well, thank you so much for your time.

17 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

18 NANCY HAIDLE: I'm Nancy Haidle. My husband
19 Ron Haidle, too, he's not able to be here, so I'm
20 speaking for the both of us, Ron and Nancy Haidle in
21 488 Northwest 12th Street, Ontario.

22 And I'm -- we're just residential customers.
23 You know, we could say we're on a limited income
24 because we're retired, but everybody in this room is
25 on a limited income, and everybody in this room is

1 from this county and they don't really spend more than
2 they get in. We're kind of different than what goes
3 on in Salem and in the government, I feel, because we
4 don't have a balanced budget a lot of the time.

5 So, anyway, you know what, it says that our
6 rates will go up 23% as residential, and you look at
7 the agriculture rates going up as 36%, that means our
8 food goes up, too, right? I mean, we -- we have to
9 say, it's not just 23% for our residential bill for
10 power, but food is going up too, and farmers are going
11 to go out of business. That's not just a maybe,
12 that's a for sure. I grew up on a farm and I know how
13 it works.

14 And I just was thinking even today they had a
15 (*inaudible*) which is a local store, the beans that I
16 bought (*inaudible*) green beans and corn I bought last
17 year for 69 cents a can were \$1.29 (*inaudible*) one
18 year later almost doubled. And it's going to get
19 worse if we have less food.

20 And so I -- I just wanted to go on record to
21 say that I think -- I agree that if -- that it's too
22 high, and that if there are incremental -- that
23 incremental increases it would work a lot better, and
24 people could maybe somehow be more prepared, at least
25 be aware.

1 I appreciate you all coming over to our side of
2 the state, we really do appreciate your travel here.
3 And I know there's others in the room here that are --
4 are all against the increase, but maybe aren't up here
5 saying something, but they are interested.

6 And thank you for coming.

7 CHAIR DECKER: Thank you.

8 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you.

9 Would anyone else like to provide comment this
10 evening?

11 *(inaudible)*

12 DEB POWELL: Okay. Hi. My name is Deb
13 Powell, I live at 237 Northwest 8th Street here in
14 Ontario. I moved here seven years ago. Born in
15 Nessa, lived my life pretty much in this area until I
16 was probably in fifth grade, left, came back.

17 I'm on fixed income, and *(inaudible)*
18 everybody's on a fixed income, we all are on a fixed
19 income. You're on fixed income. Every one of us are
20 on fixed income. And ever since COVID hit we got \$30
21 here, \$20 here, \$20 there, \$50 there, \$60 there. So
22 pretty soon our \$200 that we have left at the end of
23 the month to live on -- to live on, to put food in our
24 belly, to give our grandkids a little present once in
25 a while, you're taking that away from common people.

1 Just common people. Thirty dollars to me is a big
2 frickin' deal. Thirty dollars is a lot of money to
3 me. They just raised my mortgage because the property
4 tax goes up, 60 bucks. I can't live like that.

5 And then I go to Community Action. God bless
6 you, and god bless whoever supports that system,
7 because I don't know what I would do without them.
8 For three years I've lived -- they've helped me
9 through everything.

10 I have lived in Portland, and I love Portland
11 with all my heart, and I will never ever say I don't,
12 and I don't have a lot of respect of government, but I
13 do have respect for people and humans, and we're all
14 suffering now, every one of us. And these people make
15 money. Idaho Power makes money. They make money
16 every year. They make a profit every year, a net
17 profit every year. I don't make a profit every year,
18 neither do these folks, they make a living. There's a
19 big difference.

20 And I don't mean to be mad, but I appreciate
21 you coming in. I didn't know (*inaudible*) from Oregon
22 up there in Salem. God bless Salem and all the little
23 people up there that are crazy as hell. But we're
24 here as a family, and we've gotta fight together and
25 if we don't fight together, (*inaudible*) -- these

1 little people that are (*inaudible*) now, just little
2 people trying to live their life, the higher-ups, the
3 people up there are going to take all of it away from
4 us. And then you guys (*inaudible*) taking care of us.

5 So, I just want them to stop and think about
6 the little people. I'm just one of them, just one of
7 them. And there's kids. They've got to have
8 electricity, and mom that's trying to work two jobs
9 trying to take care of her kid, this is unacceptable.

10 And when I find out about these farmers and
11 what they pay for their frickin' -- just so they can
12 live? (*inaudible*) ridiculous and you're making a
13 profit. It's not right. And I think that people
14 should think about that just a little bit up there in
15 those great high cities, and stop thinking about what
16 they're (*inaudible*) doing to people down here in the
17 below -- and underground, because it's not fair. It's
18 not a fair thing.

19 And that \$30 a month is gonna hurt me, because
20 I'll just go to Community Action. Somebody will pay
21 for it eventually, right? Around we go.

22 So, take a note to the poor people out here in
23 the world trying to live, can't -- can't (*inaudible*)
24 if you continue to raise our rates and make our life
25 harder because we don't make the big bucks.

1 That's all I gotta say.

2 Thank you for coming. I appreciate you coming
3 out here to -- I mean, I go there all the time. I
4 love that area. I love it. And I'll protect it 'til
5 the day I die because I am an Oregonian, but this is
6 unfair. This is unfair. So I'm done crying.

7 Thank you.

8 CHAIR DECKER: Thank you.

9 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you very much.

10 Would anyone else like to provide comment this
11 evening? One final chance?

12 *(No audible response)*

13 ALJ MELLGREN: Okay.

14 So, thank you for everyone's comments this
15 evening. Again, I'd like to remind everyone that you
16 may still submit written comments by mail or email to
17 the Commission or by calling the Consumer Services
18 Division. The details for how to submit comments are
19 included in the notice for this hearing and on the
20 Commission website.

21 If you have any questions about how to submit
22 written comments, you can also email the Commission's
23 Administrative Hearings Division at PUC.hearings
24 @PUC.oregon.gov, and feel free to come ask me for that
25 again after the meeting, I'm happy to provide that.

Commissioner Tawney's Closing Remarks

1 And before we adjourn, I'll turn it back over
2 to Chair Decker for some closing remarks.

3 CHAIR DECKER: Thanks everyone for being here.

4 I -- I want you to know that it really does
5 make a difference to hear your stories and your ideas
6 for what we should be looking at as we review this
7 rate increase request.

8 I want you to know that we take our jobs very
9 seriously as decision-makers, and we are so grateful
10 to have staff like Melissa and Dan and Judge Mellgren,
11 too, that they're, you know, sort of ready to work
12 through issues with consumers every day.

13 I'm proud of our agency and the work we do, and
14 I hope that we will do you proud in scrutinizing the
15 rate request.

16 COMMISSIONER TAWNEY: Thanks so much.

17 I heard a lot of really actionable items for
18 staff to dig into, I really appreciate the close
19 reading, and everyone taking time on a weeknight and
20 when you could be working or spending time with your
21 family, or both at the same time, as farmers do. So
22 thanks very much for coming and sharing with us.

23 And as Chair Decker said, we take what we do
24 incredibly seriously, and we'll spend an enormous
25 amount of time over the next -- I suppose it's six

Commissioner Tawney's Closing Remarks

1 months -- eight months through October really
2 grappling with the issues.

3 I appreciate -- I hear so many of you run your
4 own businesses, you understand the expense side, and
5 also the -- the pressure that that then creates for
6 customers, and I really appreciate that nuance that
7 you bring to the -- to the conversation. We also are
8 looking deeply in those -- that whole range of issues.
9 So, thank you.

10 ALJ MELLGREN: Thank you very much.

11 One quick note, a recording of tonight's
12 hearing will be available on the Commission's website
13 shortly as will last week's Zoom hearing that we held.

14 And this concludes the public comment hearing
15 in UE 426. We are adjourned. Thank you.

16 **(End of Proceedings)**

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STATE OF OREGON)
) ss.
COUNTY OF Linn)

I, Jean Mueller, a Court Transcriber for the State of Oregon, do hereby certify that I transcribed the audio proceedings had upon the hearing of this cause, previously captioned herein; that I thereafter had reduced by typewriting the foregoing transcript; and that the foregoing transcript constitutes a full, true, and accurate record of the proceedings had upon the hearing of said cause, and of the whole thereof.

Dated: March 28, 2024.



Jean Mueller
Court Transcriber
541-259-1139