

Op Ed First Energy

I am proud to be a part of many local Cleveland Clergy in the African-American Community that is concerned about environmental issues impacting our communities. We have been in conversations with First Energy regarding our concerns about their proposed rate increase and its impact on families that we serve.

We were gladly surprised that FirstEnergy was willing to sit down with us and discuss our concerns. Through these conversations we have been able to find common ground with First Energy and appreciate them addressing our issues. That is why we were so dismayed when we read the recent article in the July 30 edition of the Plain Dealer which mischaracterized FirstEnergy's efforts to achieve a fair and reasonable outcome regarding its rate increase case before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO).

The first mischaracterization is in regards to the customer's rate increase that FirstEnergy is requesting. The truth of the matter is any numbers currently being discussed at the PUCO are just estimates at this point. The reality is that residential electric rates dropped an average of about \$6.00 a month.

The other mischaracterization is the article's failure to discuss why the rate increase is needed. We support FirstEnergy efforts protecting our environment while providing affordable energy to its customers. We understand there may be a small price to pay in order to ensure our land, air, and water is clean, however what we gain far exceeds that minor increase.

The final mischaracterization of the article is its failure to mention the economic engine that FirstEnergy is in our State. FirstEnergy directly or indirectly supports approximately 3,407 jobs and has an annual impact of \$568 million dollars on Ohio's economy. We believe it is in the best interest of all of us to ensure this company continues to have a long-standing presence in northeast Ohio.

In our conversations with Chuck Jones, FirstEnergy's CEO, he has committed that FirstEnergy will support energy efficiency programs to low income customers which will help offset the rate increase. Mr. Jones is also committed to aggressively reaching out to the minority community to provide employment opportunities at their salvage yard, customer service center and in the field.

I have been the Pastor of Greater Abyssinia Baptist Church in Cleveland Ohio for more than 50 years and worked on Social Justice Issues for the past 60 years with several of my fellow clergypersons. Through all of my experience I have learned that we are better together.

When the Government, Corporate America, Faith Base Community, and Community Activist/Leaders, come together to find solutions we are all better. With this in mind we strongly urge all parties to come together and arrive at a solution that represents the best interests of the customers and communities so ably served by FirstEnergy.

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Summary: Public Comment in support filed on behalf of Rev. Dr. E.T. Caviness, Senior Pastor Greater Abyssinia Baptist Church, President of Local SCLC, Cleveland Clergy Alliance electronically filed by Ms. Donielle M Hunter on behalf of PUCO Staff