

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

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In the Matter of the :
Application of Ohio Power :
Company for an Increase in: Case No. 20-585-EL-AIR
Electric Distribution :
Rates. :

- - -

In the Matter of the :
Application of Ohio Power :
Company for Tariff : Case No. 20-586-EL-ATA
Approval. :

- - -

In the Matter of the :
Application of Ohio Power :
Company for Approval to : Case No. 20-587-EL-AAM
Change Accounting Methods.:

- - -

PROCEEDINGS

before Ms. Greta See and Ms. Sarah Parrot, Attorney
Examiners, Acting Chair Beth Trombold and
Commissioner Lawrence Friedman, at the Public
Utilities Commission of Ohio, via Webex, called at
6:00 p.m. on Monday, February 8, 2021.

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1 APPEARANCES:

2 American Electric Power
3 By Mr. Steven T. Nourse,
4 Ms. Christen M. Blend,
5 and Mr. Tanner Wolffram
6 1 Riverside Plaza, 29th Floor
7 Columbus, Ohio 43215

8 On behalf of the Applicant.

9 Bruce J. Weston, Ohio Consumers' Counsel
10 By Ms. Angela O'Brien
11 and Mr. Christopher Healey,
12 Assistant Consumers' Counsel
13 65 East State Street, Suite 700
14 Columbus, Ohio 43215

15 On behalf of the Residential Customers of
16 Ohio Power Company.

17 Kegler, Brown, Hill & Ritter Co., LPA
18 By Mr. Robert Dove
19 65 East State Street, Suite 1800
20 Columbus, Ohio 43215

21 On behalf of the Ohio Partners for
22 Affordable Energy and Natural Resources
23 Defense Council.

24 Carpenter Lipps & Leland LLP
25 By Ms. Angela Paul Whitfield
26 280 North High Street, Suite 1300
27 Columbus, Ohio 43215

28 On behalf of The Kroger Company.

29 Carpenter Lipps & Leland LLP
30 By Mr. Thomas Donadio
31 280 North High Street, Suite 1300
32 Columbus, Ohio 43215

33 On behalf of the Ohio Manufacturers'
34 Association Energy Group.

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APPEARANCES: (Continued)

Dickinson Wright PLLC
By Ms. Madeline Fleisher
150 East Gay Street, Suite 2400
Columbus, Ohio 43215

On behalf of the Citizens Utility Board
of Ohio.

The Ohio Environmental Council
By Ms. Miranda R. Leppla
1145 Chesapeake Avenue, Suite I
Columbus, Ohio 43215

On behalf of The Ohio Environmental
Council.

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1 Monday Evening Session,

2 February 8, 2021.

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4 EXAMINER SEE: Let's go on the record.

5 Good evening and welcome, everyone. My
6 name is Greta See. My colleague Sarah Parrot and I
7 are Attorney Examiners with the Public Utilities
8 Commission of Ohio, and we have been assigned to this
9 case by the Commission. As such, our duties include
10 conducting the hearing in these matters.

11 Joining us this evening are Acting Chair
12 Commissioner Beth Trombold and Commissioner Lawrence
13 Friedman. In addition there are other Commission
14 staff assisting us with the hearing as cohosts and
15 technical support who will be observing the event on
16 Webex and YouTube as well as queuing up individual
17 witnesses to testify.

18 The subject of this hearing are Case Nos.
19 20-585-EL-AIR, 20-586-EL-ATA, and 20-587-EL-AAM
20 regarding the applications filed by Ohio Power
21 Company. You may also hear us refer to Ohio Power
22 Company as AEP Ohio.

23 Due to the COVID-19 emergency that
24 remains in effect under Executive Order No. 2020-01D
25 which was issued by the Governor of Ohio and

1 consistent with Substitute House Bill 404, today's
2 hearing is being held through Webex which enables
3 interested persons to offer testimony by telephone or
4 the internet regarding the applications. I note that
5 in addition the hearing is also being live streamed.

6 Before we formally get started with the
7 public hearing, I would like to address some
8 preliminary matters. First, if you experience
9 technical duties during the hearing, there are
10 several options to address the issue. If your
11 internet connection drops at any point, you can try
12 to join Webex again, or you can participate by
13 telephone. If those options are unsuccessful, please
14 call the Commission's Legal Department at (614)
15 466-6843 for assistance.

16 Finally, if you merely wish to listen to
17 the hearing, you can view the live stream on the
18 YouTube channel at youtube -- www.youtube.com/ --
19 /user/pucohio, that's P-U-C-O-H-I-O. Or you can
20 listen to the hearing by dialing 1-408-418-9388 and
21 entering meeting No. 1794147650. Let me repeat that
22 number for you one more time. It's 1-408-418-9388
23 and enter meeting No. 1794147650.

24 For those of you not testifying but who
25 wish to file a public comment regarding these cases,

1 you can do so in writing on the Commission's website
2 by electronic mail at contactthepuco@puco.ohio.gov or
3 by mail to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio at
4 180 East Broad Street, Attention Docketing Division,
5 Columbus, Ohio 43215. Written comments should
6 reference the case numbers, and those case numbers
7 again are 20-585-EL-AIR, 20-586-EL-ATA, and
8 20-587-EL-AAM.

9 More information about Webex technical
10 help options can be obtained through the chat
11 function which will be available throughout the
12 hearing. You may click on the chat button at any
13 time to obtain technical assistance or to ask
14 procedural questions during the hearing.

15 The chat feature should not be used for
16 any other purpose such as to -- to offer comments
17 about the cases that are the subject of today's
18 hearing. Please be aware that chats are recorded and
19 should not be considered private. Chats are also not
20 part of the official record for these cases.

21 As indicated in the entry issued
22 January 14, 2021, in these cases and noted in the
23 newspaper notice, witnesses were required to register
24 to testify. Individuals who have registered to
25 provide testimony should be ready to speak when their

1 name is read from the registration list. Individuals
2 who are offering testimony by Webex will be unmuted
3 by a Commission staff member when it is time for
4 their testimony. If you are providing your testimony
5 by telephone, a Commission staff member will call you
6 at the -- at the telephone number you provided when
7 it is your turn to testify.

8 Please bear with us as we work to queue
9 up each witness which may take some time. It also
10 may divert our attention at times from what is
11 happening in the hearing. If this happens, please be
12 patient and know that we are working to ensure that
13 everyone who is registered to testify has an
14 opportunity to do so.

15 We ask that you keep your testimony to a
16 reasonable length of time and avoid repetitive
17 comments. To avoid unnecessary background noise,
18 witnesses will have their microphones muted unless
19 they are testifying. Again, if you have questions
20 about this process as the hearing proceeds, please
21 use the chat function or call the Commission at (614)
22 466-6843.

23 Now to the formal introduction. The
24 Public Utilities Commission of Ohio has scheduled for
25 hearing on this date at this time via remote access

1 technology Case Nos. 20-585-EL-AIR which is entitled
2 in the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power
3 Company for an Increase in Electric Distribution
4 Rates, Case No. 20-586-EL-ATA which is entitled in
5 the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company
6 for Tariff Approval, and Case No. 20-587-EL-AAM which
7 is captioned in the Matter of the Application of Ohio
8 Power Company for Approval to Change Accounting
9 Methods.

10 At this time I would like to introduce
11 Acting Chair Trombold, Commissioner Trombold. I
12 would also like to introduce Commissioner Lawrence
13 Friedman. Would either of you like to say a few
14 words to our audience tonight?

15 CHAIRMAN TROMBOLD: Greta, I would just
16 like to introduce myself. I am Beth Trombold, the
17 Acting Chair of the Public Utilities Commission.
18 There are five Commissioners that will be overseeing
19 and deciding upon this case eventually and we are
20 here tonight in a listening mode. We want to better
21 understand what you're thinking and your views on
22 this case before us.

23 So thank you for those who are
24 participating and tuning in tonight.

25 EXAMINER SEE: Commissioner Friedman.

1 COMMISSIONER FRIEDMAN: Yes, thank you.
2 And I just wanted to echo the Acting Chair's comments
3 and thank each and every one of you who have agreed
4 to testify. Your thoughts and opinions and insights
5 are very valuable in the decision-making process.
6 Thank you.

7 EXAMINER SEE: At this time we'll take
8 appearances by counsel of the parties to this case.
9 We ask that counsel entering an appearance at this
10 time if you will be questioning any of the witnesses
11 offering testimony this evening.

12 Let's start with counsel for Ohio Power
13 Company.

14 MR. NOURSE: Thank you. Good evening,
15 your Honors, Commissioners. On behalf of AEP Ohio,
16 Steve Nourse. Also co-counsel with me here tonight
17 is Christen Blend, Tanner Wolffram. And we're also
18 looking forward to hearing the testimony about our
19 case. Thank you.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Let's move to
21 counsel for OCC.

22 MS. O'BRIEN: Good evening, Commissioners
23 and your Honors and everyone who comes to agree to
24 testify. I am here on behalf of Ohio's residential
25 consumers. And I'm here for the Ohio Consumers'

1 Counsel Bruce Weston, and I am Assistant Consumers'
2 Counsel Angela O'Brien. Also on this case is Chris
3 Healey. And welcome. And I don't believe I will
4 have any questions for those testifying.

5 EXAMINER SEE: Ms. Fleisher.

6 MS. FLEISHER: Thank you, your Honor.
7 Good evening, everyone. Madeline Fleisher. I am
8 here representing the Citizens Utility Board of Ohio
9 and will not have any questions for any of the
10 witnesses this evening. Thank you.

11 EXAMINER SEE: Mr. Dove.

12 MR. DOVE: Good evening, your Honor. I
13 am here on behalf of Natural Resources Defense
14 Council and Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy. I
15 will not have any questions for the witnesses this
16 evening.

17 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Ms. Whitfield.

18 MS. WHITFIELD: Good evening, your Honor.
19 My name is Angie Paul Whitfield. I am here on behalf
20 of The Kroger Company, and I do not anticipate having
21 any questions this evening. Thank you.

22 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any other counsel
23 that wishes to enter an appearance to pro -- this
24 evening? Ms. Leppla.

25 MS. LEPPLA: Yes, your Honor. This is

1 Miranda Leppla on behalf of the Ohio Environmental
2 Council. I do not anticipate having any questions
3 this evening. Thank you.

4 EXAMINER SEE: Is there anyone else?

5 MR. DONADIO: My name is Thomas Donadio,
6 and I would like to enter an appearance on behalf of
7 the Ohio Manufacturers' Association Energy Group. I
8 also don't anticipate on having any questions this
9 evening.

10 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Is there any other
11 counsel that needs to enter an appearance or
12 anticipates cross-examining the public witnesses
13 tonight?

14 Okay. Then let's move on. The subject
15 of this evening's hearing are the applications filed
16 by Ohio Power Company seeking an increase in the
17 electric distribution rates, approval of amendments
18 to its tariff, and approval to change accounting
19 methods.

20 The purpose of this public hearing is to
21 receive testimony regarding AEP Ohio's applications
22 from persons and on behalf of entities in the
23 Company's service territory who will be impacted by
24 the increase in rates but who are not parties to the
25 case. The public hearing is not a question and

1 answer session but is an opportunity to let the
2 Commission know what you think about the
3 applications.

4 Today's public hearing is only one aspect
5 of the process. An evidentiary hearing is scheduled
6 to begin on Thursday, March 4, 2021, through Webex.
7 The purpose of the evidentiary hearing is to allow
8 the parties to the case and other -- Ohio Power
9 Company, Staff, and the 23 other interested
10 stakeholders to provide testimony and present
11 evidence in regard to the applications.

12 Tonight's hearing is being transcribed by
13 a court reporter, Ms. Gibson from Armstrong & Okey.
14 If you are offering testimony, please speak clearly
15 so that the court reporter can accurately --
16 accurately reflect your comments on the record.
17 Please make sure that you verbally respond to all
18 questions asked in order that you can -- the
19 information can be properly transcribed.

20 In just a few minutes I will begin by
21 calling individuals who have registered to testify.
22 Each person who registered to testify will be
23 permitted to offer testimony only once in these
24 cases. We will ask you to take an oath or an
25 affirmation that what you are about to say is the

1 truth. Your testimony will then be considered as
2 part of the official record in these cases, and it
3 will be reviewed by the Commission before a final
4 decision is made on the applications.

5 Additionally, counsel for the parties,
6 the Commissioners, myself, and Attorney Examiner
7 Parrot will be permitted to ask you questions about
8 your testimony. Should you decide after I call your
9 name that you no longer wish to testify, you can pass
10 to the next witness. Also once you finish your
11 testimony, you may leave the hearing at any time you
12 wish.

13 If individuals wish to supplement their
14 testimony with an exhibit for the Commission's
15 consideration, a copy of the document citing the case
16 number along with your name must be provided to the
17 Commission by no later than February 16, 2021. You
18 can provide it by electronic mail to
19 contactthepuco@puco.ohio.gov or by U.S. mail to -- to
20 the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, 180 East
21 Broad Street, Attention Docketing Division, Columbus,
22 Ohio 43215.

23 The Commission appreciates your
24 participation in tonight's hearing, and we want
25 everyone who is registered to testify to have an

1 opportunity to do so.

2 At this time I would ask the host to call
3 our first witness.

4 MR. SCHMIDT: Mr. Gort, you've been
5 promoted. If you can enable your audio and video.

6 MR. GORT: All right. You want -- you
7 want me to take an oath, right? What do I say? I
8 swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing
9 but the truth?

10 MR. SCHMIDT: We can't see you yet,
11 Mr. Gort. Have you turned on your video?

12 MR. GORT: Okay. Just a second. Okay.
13 There we go. All right. So now start my video.

14 EXAMINER SEE: Mr. Gort, this is Greta
15 See.

16 MR. GORT: Wait. Down or up? Okay.
17 Yes.

18 EXAMINER SEE: Mr. Gort.

19 MR. GORT: Yes.

20 EXAMINER SEE: We can hear you. We can
21 hear you, but I cannot see you. Ah, thank you, sir.
22 Please raise your right hand.

23 MR. GORT: Can she see me?

24 EXAMINER SEE: Yes, we can. We can see
25 you. Mr. Gort? Mr. Gort, can you hear me?

1 Mr. Gort, if you could please raise your right hand.

2 MR. SCHMIDT: It looks like he is having
3 some bandwidth issues.

4 EXAMINER SEE: Let's give him a minute.
5 Maybe it will come in stronger. Mr. Gort, can you
6 hear me? Thank you. Do you affirm that the
7 information you are about to give is true, Mr. Gort?
8 Mr. Gort, can you hear me?

9 MR. SCHMIDT: Mr. Gort, to try and
10 alleviate some of the bandwidth issues, could you
11 disable your video and go back to just audio again?
12 I think that will -- I think that will help speed up
13 the connection, and at least then we will be able to
14 hear you clearly.

15 EXAMINER SEE: Mr. Gort, do you affirm
16 the information you are about to give is true? Can
17 you hear me, Mr. Gort? If you could respond, we
18 could go ahead with your testimony.

19 Okay. Mr. -- do you affirm that the
20 information you are about to give is true, Mr. Gort?
21 I need you to respond verbally. After you respond,
22 you can cut your video off -- okay.

23 Okay. Micah, could someone continue to
24 work with Mr. Gort?

25 MR. SCHMIDT: Yes.

1 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Could someone
2 promote our next witness. I believe that's Mr. --
3 Ms. or Mr. Williams.

4 MR. SCHMIDT: You've been promoted. If
5 you can enable your audio and video.

6 EXAMINER SEE: Good evening,
7 Mr. Williams.

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Good evening, your Honor.
9 How are you?

10 EXAMINER SEE: I am fine. Could you
11 please raise your rate hand, sir. Could you please
12 raise your right hand.

13 (Witness sworn.)

14 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell
15 your name for the record and provide us your address.

16 MR. WILLIAMS: Sidney Williams,
17 S-I-D-N-E-Y W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S. I reside at 412
18 Berkeley Road, Columbus, Ohio 43205.

19 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you, sir. Proceed
20 with your testimony.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: My name is Sidney
22 Williams, and I'm speaking on behalf of Service
23 Workers Advocacy Project. I'm calling on the Public
24 Utilities Commission of Ohio to deny AEP's
25 application for an increase in rates. There are

1 service workers whose income doesn't meet our
2 day-to-day survival needs. The basic needs working
3 people have to survive the winter, i.e., shelter,
4 heat, food, have systemically been denied us. It is
5 not that the resources don't exist in this country.
6 They require money that working people just don't
7 have.

8 These are unprecedented times. We are in
9 the middle of a global pandemic and an economic
10 crisis that has had a greater impact than that of the
11 Great Depression and the 2008 economic crisis.

12 Locally since March hunger has increased 25 percent,
13 and Ohio's only got back less than half the jobs it
14 lost in March. Most of our jobs are temporary and
15 low pay. In June AEP President and Chief Operating
16 Officer said we understand that our state and our
17 customers are just beginning to recovery from the
18 economic impact of COVID-19. The delay we have
19 requested will give the economy more time to bounce
20 back before any rate changes go into effect.

21 So now it's February, and we still
22 haven't recovered. This is why we strongly oppose
23 AEP's latest request for a \$40 million increase in
24 rates and demand that PUCO do not -- do its job and
25 provide adequate access to utilities for all Ohioans

1 and stop the shutoffs. PUCO lifted the pandemic
2 moratorium on shutoffs in September. It affected
3 Ohio, continue to serve to this day. And the
4 economic crisis is far from over. Having electricity
5 to maintain hot water heaters and furnaces to stay
6 warm to be able to quarantine and shelter in place
7 are crucial to stop this -- to stop the spread of
8 this virus.

9 Now, we have fought against utility
10 shutoffs winning cases by demanding that PUCO do its
11 job and stop the shutoff. One family member was on a
12 ventilator, and AEP refused to extend the payment by
13 three days to prevent the shutoff. After hours on
14 the phone to several people at the Company and PUCO,
15 we got the delay.

16 Now, others for whom we've stopped
17 shutoff include families. We have had the
18 breadwinner lose their job to the pandemic and the
19 shutdown. Another victim was, had increased violence
20 in our communities fueled by increased desperation, a
21 victim of gun violence and a robbery.

22 They only represent a fraction of Ohioans
23 who are behind on their utility bills. Now, in July,
24 a month after AEP made its \$40 million application
25 for an increase in rates, there was 91,000 AEP

1 customers statewide behind on their electric bill.

2 They couldn't afford the rates as they stand.

3 In 2017, we took a case to the
4 administrative hearing at PUCO because AEP refused to
5 negotiate to a lower payment plan than \$800 a month.

6 When we pointed out that the state regulation
7 mandates a reasonable payment plan, the AEP lawyer
8 said that's what's reasonable to our investors.

9 Two of the utility company's shareholders
10 include BlackRock and Vanguard. BlackRock alone
11 holds \$8 trillion in assets and is the largest
12 landlord in the world. What's reasonable to
13 BlackRock is not reasonable to low paid workers in
14 small businesses and others throughout our area.

15 In 2015, we assigned onto the 2030
16 sustainable development agenda including SDG No. 7.
17 That was to ensure access to affordable, reliable,
18 and sustainable modern energy for all. We demand
19 that PUCO decide on how they are going to implement
20 this goal in full and now. PUCO is obligated to
21 submit -- to provide access to a utility for all
22 Ohioans, and SWAP calls upon the state to make good
23 on its mission now and stop all disconnections,
24 implement SDG 7 to make utilities affordable and
25 accessible to all Ohioans. Deny AEP's rate hike

1 request.

2 Thank you.

3 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Is there any
4 cross-examination? Is there any cross-examination
5 for this witness?

6 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

7 EXAMINER SEE: Hearing none, thank you
8 very much. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

9 Could the host please recall Mr. Gort.
10 Is he available?

11 MR. SCHMIDT: We're still having issues
12 with Mr. Gort. Let's go down the list and when we
13 get him sorted, we'll -- we'll stick him back in the
14 lineup.

15 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Thank you very
16 much. The next witness.

17 MR. SCHMIDT: Lynette Curry, you've been
18 promoted. If you can enable your audio and video.

19 MS. CURRY: Good evening, your Honor.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Good evening, Ms. Curry.
21 Could you please raise your right hand.

22 MS. CURRY: Yes, ma'am.

23 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you.

24 (Witness sworn.)

25 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell

1 your name for the record and provide us your address.

2 MS. CURRY: Lynette, L-Y-N-E-T-T-E,
3 Curry, C-U-R-R-Y. My address is 1231 East 20th
4 Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43211.

5 EXAMINER SEE: Go ahead with your
6 testimony, ma'am.

7 MS. CURRY: Okay. Good evening and thank
8 you all for listening, your Honor and the panel. I
9 hope that you all hear me.

10 I am calling on behalf of PUCO to deny
11 this rate hike because -- and stop utility shutoffs.
12 I'm a United States Air Force veteran, disabled
13 veteran at that, representing all my fellow vets and
14 low income citizens of Ohio.

15 It is appalling that you all are sitting
16 there comfortably with your \$132,000 salaries wanting
17 to burden us with another rate hike on our electric
18 bills. 2 to 3 dollars may not be much of anything to
19 you all, but it's a big deal to us, and your wealthy,
20 harsh shareholders, but we can't afford a penny more.
21 The struggle is real for us.

22 AEP has made \$10.4 billion in profits on
23 our backs, and now you want to make our load even
24 heavier? How cruel and insensitive is that? When I
25 took my oath in 1976 for my enlistment in the

1 military, the key words were to serve and protect. I
2 meant it. Do you?

3 In July, only a month after AEP made the
4 application for increase in rates, 91,000 customers
5 were behind on their bills. Who are you serving and
6 protecting? It's our tax dollars that pay the Public
7 Utilities Commission of Ohio to regulate monopoly
8 utility companies. AEP didn't pay any taxes last
9 year. They have teams of lawyers and accountants to
10 figure in how to get away with that. So I think you
11 should serve us.

12 PUCO lifted -- and then in September,
13 PUCO lifted a voluntary moratorium on shutoffs during
14 the pandemic. You said you had it -- had to lift it
15 because people have to pay their bills. Well, I want
16 to pay my bills. We want to pay our bills. But we
17 are isolated at home. Our kids have to go to school
18 online. Our restaurants and hospitality jobs are
19 gone.

20 You tell us we have to pay our bills
21 while the state tells us we can't work. It doesn't
22 give us the protection we need to stop the virus. I
23 am on a fixed income like many, and I am left to
24 choose between the expense I will pay this month or
25 the next. Yet when AEP needed protection from less

1 people using electricity because of energy
2 efficiency, they had HB6, and you know about that.
3 When less people used electricity because of the
4 pandemic, AEP still got a sizable profit. Members of
5 this very Commission and the state legislature
6 personally benefited from that very well until you
7 got caught.

8 PUCO, it's time to serve and protect us,
9 the majority. Just giving more government
10 assistance, another subsidy to AEP paid for by the
11 ratepayers and taxpayers, isn't the answer. I fought
12 for my country, and I don't think we would have to
13 humiliate ourselves to the assistance so AEP can make
14 more money.

15 PUCO, I ask you without reservation and
16 respectfully do your job. Provide adequate access to
17 utilities for the rest of us and deny AEP this rate
18 hike. Help us restore our faith in you.

19 Thank you, your Honor.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you. Are there any
21 cross-examination questions for this witness?

22 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

23 EXAMINER SEE: Hearing none, thank you,
24 Ms. Curry.

25 MS. CURRY: You're welcome. Appreciate

1 it.

2 EXAMINER SEE: If the host could promote
3 our next witness.

4 MR. SCHMIDT: Uriel Grimaldo, you've been
5 promoted. If you can enable your audio and video.

6 MR. GRIMALDO: Can you folks hear me, see
7 me just fine?

8 EXAMINER SEE: Yes, we can, sir. Can you
9 raise your right hand.

10 (Witness sworn.)

11 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell
12 your name for the record and provide us your address.

13 MR. GRIMALDO: My name is Uriel Grimaldo.
14 First name is spelled U-R-I-E-L, last name
15 G-R-I-M-A-L-D-O. And my address is 2542 Glen Echo
16 Drive, Apartment A, Columbus, Ohio 43202.

17 EXAMINER SEE: Go ahead with your
18 testimony, sir.

19 MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you. Thank for
20 having me. I am calling on the PUCO to deny this AEP
21 rate hike. I've been a gig worker for six years, and
22 I am not alone. 80 percent of the new jobs in this
23 area are temporary or gig jobs. We don't have a
24 steady income. We have to piece together work to pay
25 our bills. We aren't guaranteed work, but we are

1 guaranteed increasing costs.

2 Rents in Columbus alone have gone up
3 50 percent since 2010. Yet AEP, a multimillion
4 dollar monopoly, utility company, thus get a
5 guaranteed profit. In fact, they get a 10 percent
6 return on equity which is one of the highest of all
7 regulated utility companies in the nation.

8 I'm also a volunteer organizer working
9 with low income workers in central Ohio. Because I
10 am bilingual I speak with many Hispanic workers in
11 Columbus. Immigrants often don't qualify for
12 assistance but neither did most of us. 82 percent of
13 the CARES funding went to people making more than
14 \$100,000 a year. One in three households in the U.S.
15 struggled to pay their energy bills before the
16 pandemic. After the COVID-19 outbreak, 48 percent of
17 black, 44 percent of the Hispanic, and 26 percent of
18 white adults reported having trouble paying monthly
19 bills according to a Pew Research poll.

20 Allowing this rate hike will hit the poor
21 and minority community the hardest, and in the face
22 of these conditions, letting AEP get another rate
23 hike in the middle of a pandemic would be barbaric,
24 adding insult to injury as hundreds of thousands are
25 choosing between utilities and food. This hearing is

1 for a multimillion corporation raking in steady
2 profits. AEP benefits from decoupling put in under
3 HB6. Efficiency has gone up; demand has gone down.
4 What about the price of electricity? A customer paid
5 on average \$143 a month in 2010, and today the same
6 customer is now paying about \$185 a month.

7 It's time the PUCO do right by working
8 people in central Ohio and act on behalf of the
9 consumer. Stop abetting the ever increasing rates of
10 profits of a company that makes business at the
11 expense of far continuing impoverishments. Utilities
12 are not a luxury. They are a human right. In
13 Spanish we say ;basta ya! Enough is enough!

14 You are the regulators. We expect the
15 Public Utilities of Ohio to do the right thing. Deny
16 the rate hikes, lower the rates, and put an end to
17 the shutoffs.

18 That's all for me.

19 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Any
20 cross-examination for this witness?

21 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

22 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you, sir. Thank you
23 for your testimony.

24 MR. GRIMALDO: Thank you. Thank you for
25 your time.

1 EXAMINER SEE: If the host could promote
2 the next witness.

3 MS. KOCHER: Your Honor, I have
4 Mr. William Gort to testify as a telephone witness.

5 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Mr. Gort, could you
6 raise your right hand, please.

7 MR. GORT: Yes. My right hand is raised.

8 (Witness sworn.)

9 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell
10 your name for the record and give us your address.

11 MR. GORT: My name is William Gort,
12 W-I-L-L-I-A-M, and my last name is Gort. That's G as
13 in gorilla, O as in orange, red -- R as in red, T as
14 in tomato. And I live at 3677 North High Street
15 which is in Clintonville, and I live in Apartment F.

16 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Go ahead with your
17 testimony, sir.

18 MR. GORT: Okay. PUCO, deny AEP's
19 application of an increase in rates. Food, clothing,
20 water, electricity, light, heat in the coldest months
21 of winter are not luxuries and should not be denied
22 to anyone because they can't afford it.

23 Working as a volunteer utility advocate
24 opened my eyes to an unpleasant reality that I was
25 lucky enough to never personally experience growing

1 up. That is the fact that many people simply cannot
2 afford basic survival necessities.

3 A recent case stands out of the many that
4 I have dealt with. A woman was the head of
5 household, had her electricity scheduled to be shut
6 off in late December. She needed a three-day
7 extension in order to allow a Social Security check
8 to arrive in time for her to pay enough to stop the
9 shutoff. She owed AEP \$2,100 but only had 21 cents
10 to her name. She shared her home with five other
11 people, one of whom was a terminal cancer patient who
12 required the use of a ventilator.

13 She had already used two medical
14 certificates which only buy a 30-day reprieve and
15 wanted to avoid using the third and final certificate
16 of the year. She had the money. It would just take
17 three days after the threat of termination to get it.
18 I was on the phone for over four hours negotiating
19 with AEP and PUCO to get her three days of extra
20 time.

21 During these negotiations, I heard from
22 Leslie, a customer service rep at AEP, "PUCO has all
23 authority over us." When I asked if PUCO had the
24 authority to push a shutoff back three days, she
25 replied, "Yes, they do."

1 This was later contradicted by Dorita at
2 PUCO who proclaimed "I don't have the authority to
3 delay a shutoff by 5 minutes, and I am only
4 authorized to enforce Ohio Revised Code." Dorita
5 furthermore said "I'm surprised that you as an
6 advocate would be wasting so much of your time."

7 The reason I was talking to Dorita at
8 PUCO was because Leslie at AEP had informed me "You
9 will not be able to get to anyone above Casey,"
10 Leslie's supervisor, "because he is the highest
11 supervisor on the floor, and nobody above him takes
12 calls." Casey later hung up on me and their
13 customer.

14 I eventually reached a PUCO supervisor
15 who was more sympathetic. What he told us was that
16 "You are preaching to the choir but that there is no
17 due process at this level." He further stated "What
18 you are asking for is another moratorium and that has
19 to come from the Governor." He offered to ask AEP to
20 grant an extension but expected that they would say
21 no. The next day I found out that he was actually
22 successful, and AEP gave a three-day extension.

23 The actions of that supervisor probably
24 saved a life, but they did so in spite of the policy
25 of both AEP and the Public Utilities Commission. It

1 is stop passing the buck and take some responsibility
2 for your mission.

3 The people who work in AEP and PUCO are
4 not inhumane, but they are expected to enforce
5 inhumane policies. Privately I suspect that most of
6 them like that supervisor agree with us. It is your
7 job as Commissioners to protect the lives of the
8 people of Ohio and to stop the shutoffs and not raise
9 electricity rates that the people already cannot
10 afford to pay. Deny the rate hike and stop the
11 shutoffs.

12 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any -- does that
13 conclude your testimony, Mr. Gort?

14 MR. GORT: Yes.

15 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any
16 cross-examination for this witness?

17 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

18 EXAMINER SEE: Hearing none, thank you,
19 Mr. Gort.

20 MR. GORT: Thank you.

21 EXAMINER SEE: Could the host please
22 promote our next witness.

23 MR. SCHMIDT: Mr. Molk, you've been
24 promoted. If you could enable your audio and video.
25 Stephen Molk, can you enable your audio and video?

1 MR. MOLK: Okay. I guess you can hear me
2 now.

3 EXAMINER SEE: Yes, we can, Mr. Molk.

4 MR. MOLK: Can you see me?

5 EXAMINER SEE: Not yet.

6 MR. MOLK: I think I found it.

7 All right. Can you see me now?

8 EXAMINER SEE: Yes, we can, Mr. Molk.

9 Could you raise your right hand, please.

10 (Witness sworn.)

11 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you. Please state
12 and spell your name for the record and provide us
13 your address.

14 MR. MOLK: My name is Stephen Molk, first
15 name S-T-E-P-H-E-N, last name M-O-L-K. My address is
16 500, 5-0-0, Chilcote Avenue, C-H-I-L-C-O-T-E, Avenue,
17 in Columbus, Ohio 43202.

18 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Go ahead with your
19 testimony, sir.

20 MR. MOLK: Well, good evening, everyone.
21 My name is Stephen Molk, and I live in Columbus,
22 Ohio. I am speaking on behalf of myself to oppose
23 American Electric Power's request for a \$40 million
24 rate increase for Ohio consumers. I am a retired
25 teacher on a fixed income, and any increase in

1 utility payments will cause increased stress on my
2 budget.

3 I know this is true of many other people
4 as well. There are families that I deliver emergency
5 food to nearly every week as a volunteer for the
6 Mid-Ohio Workers Association. And I can see by their
7 living conditions that they can ill afford to pay
8 more for electricity.

9 40 years ago I was a member of Ohioans
10 for Utility Reform, a volunteer group united to speak
11 out for low income consumers and to promote safe
12 energy sources. Back then I studied utility pricing
13 and could have given you technical reasons why a rate
14 increase is inappropriate. Today I just know it's
15 wrong. So many people have lost their jobs and have
16 catastrophic medical bills because of the coronavirus
17 pandemic.

18 Our Federal Government recognizes that
19 people are suffering economically, and the government
20 is moving forward with providing more money to
21 taxpayers to relieve the burden and stimulate the
22 economy. It just doesn't make sense to take that
23 money back for utility payments.

24 These are extraordinary times. Many of
25 us are still essentially sheltering in place to avoid

1 exposure to COVID-19. This means we need functioning
2 water heaters, furnaces, and appliances to stay warm
3 and keep clean and healthy in our homes.

4 In addition to refusing this rate
5 request, PUCO should also act to extend the
6 moratorium on shutoffs that expired last fall. In
7 addition, with the General Assembly lagging on the
8 proposed repeal of House Bill 6, the utility bailout
9 bill, Ohio's utilities are already receiving a
10 windfall in rates being charged. Why should PUCO
11 approve an additional amount on top of this before
12 HB6 is repealed?

13 It's time for the PUCO to put the needs
14 of millions of Ohioans who will suffer hardships from
15 this rate hike before the financial wants of the
16 giant corporation and its shareholders. PUCO must
17 say to AEP and Ohio Power now is not a good time for
18 this.

19 Thank you for your attention.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you, Mr. Molk.

21 Is there any cross-examination for
22 Mr. Molk?

23 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

24 EXAMINER SEE: Hearing none, thank you
25 very much, Mr. Molk.

1 MR. MOLK: You're welcome.

2 EXAMINER SEE: If the host could promote
3 the next witness.

4 MR. SCHMIDT: I think we have
5 Ms. Washington on the line.

6 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Ms. Washington.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Your Honor, I have
8 Ms. Washington, our telephone witness, on the line.
9 Go ahead, ma'am.

10 EXAMINER SEE: Ms. Washington, can you
11 hear me?

12 MS. WASHINGTON: Yes, I can.

13 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Could you raise
14 your right hand.

15 MS. WASHINGTON: Yes, it's raised.

16 (Witness sworn.)

17 EXAMINER SEE: Could you please state and
18 spell your name for the record and also provide us
19 your address.

20 MS. WASHINGTON: My name is Rudnae
21 Washington. My name is spelled R-U-D as in David, N
22 like Nancy, A-E, Washington, W-A-S-H-I-N-G-T-O-N. My
23 address is 1387 Manchester Avenue, Columbus, Ohio
24 43211.

25 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. And go ahead with

1 your testimony, Ms. Washington.

2 MS. WASHINGTON: Okay. My name is Rudnae
3 Washington, and I strongly oppose AEP's latest
4 request for a 40 million increase in rates. I demand
5 that the PUCO do its job and provide adequate access
6 to utilities for all of Ohioans and to stop shutoffs.

7 I want -- I've been working as a clerk in
8 the mailroom for the state. I know what it's like to
9 have my utilities shut off. And if you have a back
10 bill, you can't rent a new place. Homeless shelters
11 are full of children, women, veterans, and many more
12 because they have debt to AEP. To rise electric
13 rates during this pandemic puts more people at risk
14 losing family, health, and livelihood.

15 PUCO, deny the rate hike and stop all --
16 stop the shutoffs. Thank you.

17 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any
18 cross-examination for Ms. Washington?

19 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you, Ms. Washington.

21 MS. WASHINGTON: Thank you for your time.

22 EXAMINER SEE: If the host could please
23 promote the next witness.

24 MR. SCHMIDT: Ms. Yates, you've been
25 promoted. If you could enable your audio and video.

1 MS. YATES: Can you see me and hear me?

2 EXAMINER SEE: We can hear you, Ms.

3 Yates, but we cannot see you yet. Give it a moment.

4 MS. YATES: Okay.

5 EXAMINER SEE: We can see you now.

6 MS. YATES: Okay.

7 EXAMINER SEE: Ma'am, if you could please
8 raise your right hand.

9 (Witness sworn.)

10 EXAMINER SEE: State and spell your name
11 for the record and provide us your address.

12 MS. YATES: My name is Charlotte Yates,
13 C-H-A-R-L-O-T-T-E Y-A-T-E-S. My address is 282-1/2
14 East Gay Street, 43215.

15 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Go ahead with your
16 testimony, ma'am.

17 MS. YATES: My name is Charlotte Yates,
18 and I'm a retired nurse. And I am voicing my strong
19 opposition to the American Electric Power rate hike
20 request and call on the PUCO to deny this request.

21 Since my retirement I've dedicated many
22 years to working in low income communities. I have
23 seen firsthand how 50 percent of families couldn't
24 afford a \$400 emergency and that was before the
25 pandemic.

1 I have seen families who I've arranged
2 donated medical appointments for because they
3 couldn't afford to see a doctor on their own cancel
4 on that appointment. I didn't understand why they
5 would cancel. How could their health not be their
6 first priority? I found out it was because their
7 first priority was dealing with the disconnection
8 notice from the utility company. What's the point of
9 getting treatment for pneumonia when you are going
10 home to a cold house?

11 I've heard a customer service
12 representative from AEP say that they would sooner
13 call Children Services on a struggling parent who
14 couldn't afford their bill than stop their shutoff.
15 I've personally taken people early in the morning to
16 wait for hours in the queue in front of the heating
17 assistance agency so that they could be first in line
18 in order to hopefully, if they have the right papers,
19 get emergency heating assistance. What kind of
20 country is this where getting heating assistance is
21 like playing the lottery?

22 In the medical profession, we are
23 required to do no harm. But we don't have control
24 over the harm the utilities do. PUCO, your mission
25 is to assure all residential and business consumers

1 access to adequate, safe, and reliable utility
2 services at fair prices while facilitating an
3 environment that provides competitive choices. If a
4 citizen of Ohio cannot afford utilities, that's not
5 adequate or safe.

6 American Electric Power is one of the
7 most profitable energy companies in the country who
8 the Ohio Supreme Court has let keep over \$526 million
9 of our money in utility charges that the Company
10 unjustly profited from since 2009. Why doesn't AEP
11 tap into that money they were unjustly allowed to
12 keep instead of raising our rates?

13 American Electric Power CEO Nick Akins
14 makes \$14 million per year while one of out of three
15 Ohioans chooses between rent, food, and utilities
16 because they can't afford to pay for all three.

17 PUCO, you have a job to represent the
18 public, us, the taxpayers. Do your job. Deny the
19 rate hike. Stop the shutoffs for all Ohioans.

20 EXAMINER SEE: Does that conclude your
21 testimony, Ms. Yates?

22 MS. YATES: It does.

23 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Are there any --
24 are there any questions on cross-examination for this
25 witness?

1 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

2 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you very much,

3 Ms. Yates.

4 MS. YATES: You're welcome.

5 EXAMINER SEE: If the host could promote
6 the next witness.

7 MR. SCHMIDT: Roger Clair, you've been
8 promoted. If you could enable your audio and video.

9 MR. CLAIR: Okay. See me?

10 EXAMINER SEE: Yes, we can see you, and
11 we can hear you, Mr. Clair.

12 MR. CLAIR: All right.

13 EXAMINER SEE: Could you raise your right
14 hand, please.

15 (Witness sworn.)

16 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell
17 your name for the record and provide your address.

18 MR. CLAIR: Okay. Roger, R-O-G-E-R,
19 Clair, C-L-A-I-R.

20 EXAMINER SEE: You may drop your hand
21 now, Mr. Clair, and give us your address.

22 MR. CLAIR: 4794 Mockingbird Court South,
23 Apartment A.

24 EXAMINER SEE: Go ahead with your
25 testimony.

1 MR. CLAIR: Okay. Hi. My name is Roger
2 Clair, and I call on PUCO to oppose the electric rate
3 hike by AEP Ohio. I clean hospital rooms. I never
4 stopped working or took a day off during this
5 pandemic. I am an essential worker on the front
6 lines of this public health crisis. We keep the
7 hospitals clean so that medical staff can treat the
8 patient who get COVID and other illnesses. It is
9 outrageous that after the patient leaves the
10 hospital, they could come home to recover with no
11 electricity, no hot water to wash their hands, or
12 adequate shelter to stop the spread of COVID.

13 At the Super Bowl last night, the
14 President called healthcare workers heros because we
15 did our job. How about PUCO? Why can't you do your
16 job and put Ohioans' lives above AEP's profits?
17 Hundreds of thousands of Ohioans are out of work. A
18 quarter of a million are facing eviction. It is
19 obscene that a multibillion dollar monopolistic
20 corporation would even think about a rate increase
21 under these circumstances.

22 Seven other states didn't lift their
23 moratorium put in place for the pandemic including
24 two of the biggest states in the nation, California
25 and New York. How about Ohio?

1 PUCO, do your job. Deny AEP's rate hike.
2 Make utilities affordable and accessible to all
3 Ohioans and stop the shutoffs.

4 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any
5 cross-examination for Mr. Clair?

6 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

7 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you very much,
8 Mr. Clair. If the host could promote the next
9 witness.

10 MR. SCHMIDT: I'm having trouble
11 promoting our last witness. Give me one minute.

12 EXAMINER SEE: Okay.

13 MR. SCHMIDT: Ms. Ritchey, we are having
14 trouble promoting you, so we are going to have
15 somebody call you right now to take your testimony
16 over the phone. So if you could just answer when
17 they call.

18 MS. KOCHER: Okay. I have Ms. Jill
19 Ritchey on the phone.

20 Ms. Ritchey, you can go ahead.

21 EXAMINER SEE: Ms. Ritchey.

22 MS. RITCHEY: Yes.

23 EXAMINER SEE: If you could raise your
24 right hand, please, ma'am.

25 MS. RITCHEY: It is raised.

1 (Witness sworn.)

2 EXAMINER SEE: Please state and spell
3 your name for the record and give us your address.

4 MS. RITCHEY: Jill Ritchey, J-I-L-L
5 R-I-T-C-H-E-Y, 8199 Bertson Place Columbus, Ohio
6 43235.

7 EXAMINER SEE: Okay. Go ahead with your
8 testimony.

9 MS. RITCHEY: Hi. My name is Jill
10 Ritchey. I am a nurse and teacher. I call upon PUCO
11 to deny AEP's rate hike request. I am very well
12 aware of the impact that heating and cooling has on
13 health and well-being. I am very much aware of the
14 social determinants of health, specifically housing
15 and heating.

16 Families that are threatened with or
17 experience utility shutoffs are energy insecure.
18 Studies in public health journals show that energy
19 insecure families have a higher rate of respiratory
20 illnesses, sleep disorders, depression, and
21 developmental delays than families who are energy
22 secure. Of course, this impacts low income
23 communities and children the most.

24 I'm astonished that we have to be here to
25 protect Ohio citizens in the middle of a pandemic in

1 the middle of winter. Ohioans have never recovered
2 from the 2008 financial crisis, and now we are here
3 to approve more money to be transferred from us to
4 these pirates. PUCO's stated mission to ensure all
5 residents and business consumers access to adequate,
6 safe, and reliable utility services at fair prices
7 while facilitating an environment that provides
8 competitive choices.

9 There's no choice. Choice for over
10 50 percent of Ohioans is choice between heating and
11 eating. Like all things that are vital to our
12 welfare, safe housing which includes utilities, we
13 have no choice. The decisions are made. The only
14 choice many have is to suffer without vital utilities
15 or go without other necessities.

16 The other choice many have is to be
17 enslaved to AEP's debt peonage. Ordinary citizens
18 don't have the time to follow the money, to track the
19 donations from AEP to public offices, but it is my
20 guess there are lawyers and other experts on the
21 Commission who have lots of experience in
22 representing public utilities, sitting on the boards
23 for utility associations, and representing the
24 interests of utility companies. Ordinary citizens
25 which are becoming increasingly poor don't have

1 lobbyists or even a voice if they do have the time to
2 follow the money.

3 But what we do know is that in 2019
4 former FirstEnergy CEO Chuck Jones announced that HB6
5 made the companies recession-proof because the
6 decoupling rider charged the Ohio utility customers
7 to pay for any loss in the monopoly utility company's
8 profit. He said this a year before he was fired when
9 he admitted under F.B.I. investigation that he had
10 paid \$4 million to Sam Randazzo, PUCO former
11 chairman.

12 For what? Randazzo helped write the HB6
13 law. This by the way is the same law that AEP
14 benefits from and lobbied for as well. AEP posted
15 10.4 million in profits in 2020 during a pandemic
16 when big energy users like offices and schools were
17 shut down. How about the rest of us? We still
18 haven't recovered our jobs, and now AEP is going to
19 raise our rates again?

20 Enough is enough. I don't blame AEP.
21 They are an animal that is doing what it is designed
22 to do, make a profit, protect its shareholders,
23 improve its stock trade which requires CEOs to make
24 an astonishing amount of money. All the while AEP's
25 CEOs are making tens of millions in salary, families

1 are having their heat shut off, but here they are
2 asking to shave off more, hollowing out the middle
3 class, and making people poor and those who were poor
4 poorer and more desperate. Austerity for us;
5 socialism for the rich.

6 As I said, AEP is doing what it is
7 designed to do; but, PUCO, we pay you to do your job.
8 Protect those without lobbyists. Provide access to
9 adequate, safe, and reliable utility services at fair
10 prices. Take your public service duties seriously.
11 Consider turning away from politics as usual. Stop
12 serving those who lobby against the 99 percent.
13 Prove to the rest of us that you can follow your
14 mission by stopping the rate hike and stopping the
15 shutoff.

16 This concludes my testimony.

17 EXAMINER SEE: Is there any
18 cross-examination for Ms. -- for the last -- for
19 Ms. Ritchey?

20 MR. NOURSE: No, thank you, your Honor.

21 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you very much,
22 Ms. Ritchey.

23 MS. RITCHEY: Uh-huh.

24 EXAMINER SEE: That is our last witness
25 for tonight. I would like to thank everyone for

1 participating in tonight's hearing.

2 Chair Trombold, did you want to say
3 anything?

4 CHAIRMAN TROMBOLD: No, your Honor. I
5 just want to echo your comments in saying thank you,
6 and we appreciate everyone who took the time to
7 testify tonight. Thank you.

8 EXAMINER SEE: Thank you very much.
9 The hearing is adjourned.

10 (Thereupon, at 7:07 p.m., the hearing was
11 adjourned.)

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CERTIFICATE

I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the proceedings taken by me in this matter on Monday, February 8, 2021, and carefully compared with my original stenographic notes.

Karen Sue Gibson, Registered
Merit Reporter.

(KSG-7034)

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Case No(s). 20-0585-EL-AIR, 20-0586-EL-ATA, 20-0587-EL-AAM

Summary: Transcript February 8th 2021

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company for an Increase in Electric Distribution Rates.

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company for Tariff Approval.

In the Matter of the Application of Ohio Power Company for Approval to Change Accounting Methods. electronically filed by Mr. Ken Spencer on behalf of Armstrong & Okey, Inc. and Gibson, Karen Sue Mrs.