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Letter of Petition to Alan R. Schriber, Chairman, PUCO

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio

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MAY 05 2006

Office of Chairman
P.U.C.O.Received
Chairman Letter

MAY 12 2006

Investigation and Audit Division
P.U.C.O.May 6, 2006
January 31, 2006

Dear Chairman Schriber,

05-221-GA-GCR

In a world where the energy sector of the global economy has been affected by enormous changes – from threats to the market from South American oil producers to the conflict in the Persian Gulf to the effects of Hurricane Katrina – one thing has remained constant for the last decade: Natural gas prices have increased in Northwest Ohio.

Since 1994, we have seen consistent increases in natural gas costs in Northwest Ohio, an area already historically burdened with high utility costs. In June, 2005, Ohio Public Utilities Commissioner Judy Jones filed a dissent (PUCO Case #05-597-GA-UEx) in which she said that "as a matter of principal" she would not support any rate changes until the base rates and expenses of the Columbia Gas' distribution services were audited. "Since the Commission still has not had a complete financial analysis of the full financial picture of Columbia," Jones could not support rate increases and "continue(d) to believe that this is bad public policy."

The price of gas affects us all. The effects of high energy costs don't stop when people pay their gas bills. They stack the deck against us when we try to interest national and international businesses in moving into Toledo and make it harder to keep our people working. Small business people often face tight budgets and even tighter profit margins and high gas prices also mean fewer dollars are spent in local businesses. This reduction of economic activity means less business for stores and restaurants and less work for people in the retail sector.

Consumers are, of course, directly affected. Higher utility costs find their way into the lives of consumers in a number of ways. In a year where the average family in Ohio has seen their gas bills rise 45%, households have been forced to make tough decisions. Struggling families, in order to stay within tight budgets, shouldn't be forced to choose between adequately heating their homes and feeding their children or visiting the doctor.

WE THE UNDERSIGNED THEREFORE ASK THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION FOR A FULL AUDIT OF COLUMBIA GAS' COSTS AND EXPENSES AND DEMAND AND, IN LIGHT OF THEIR CURRENT SUBSTANTIAL PROFITS, THAT COLUMBIA GAS SHOW CAUSE AND DISCLOSE THOSE SCHEDULES NECESSARY TO DETERMINE IF THEIR CURRENT RATES AND PROFIT CONTINUES TO BE APPROPRIATE.

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