

NJ Coalition for Affordable Power

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NEW JERSEY CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUPS AND TRADE ASSOCIATIONS FORM A COALITION TO ADVANCE ENERGY POLICY THAT PROTECTS ALL RATEPAYERS FROM HIGHER ENERGY RATES, WHILE ENSURING THAT THE LIGHTS STAY ON

May 15, 2013 (Trenton, NJ) – New Jersey’s extraordinarily high energy rates and the approximately \$8 billion in energy proposals before the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the New Jersey Legislature have brought together AARP New Jersey, the Chemistry Council of New Jersey (CCNJ), New Jersey Citizen Action (NJCA), New Jersey Large Energy Users Coalition (NJLEUC), New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG), and the New Jersey Main Street Alliance to form the New Jersey Coalition for Affordable Power (NJCAP).

Recent weather events are forceful reminders of the essential role of reliable utility services to consumers and employers in today’s world. Affordable utility services are central to the health of New Jersey’s economy.

“We all want reliable service,” said Marilyn Askin, chief legislative advocate for AARP New Jersey. “But we expect the administration to do their job and make sure we are not paying too much for too little. And in the end, bill payers should only pay for what is fair and reasonable – and not a dime more.”

New Jersey has the 7th highest electric rates for residential customers, the 8th highest for industrial customers, and the 9th highest for commercial customers in the country, which pose significant problems for families and businesses alike. All consumers – residential, commercial and industrial - must be able to rely on the availability of safe, affordable, and quality utility services.

"Storm after storm, New Jersey's utility companies have left consumers in the dark. From Hurricane Irene to Sandy, utilities have neglected to prioritize upgrades that improve reliability, response time, and communication with customers," said Jen Kim, NJPIRG state director. "The utilities shouldn't use Sandy as a reason to charge consumers again for work they should have already done. Any proposal from the utilities needs to be fully examined for effectiveness and cost. The public is relying on Governor Christie and the BPU to continue to stand up for them in the wake of Sandy and hold utilities accountable for what they are doing with ratepayer money."

NJCAP has come together to advance standards which must underlie the development, evaluation, and comparison of utility policies and proposals at the federal, state, and local levels.

“Despite what you may read or hear, the member companies of the Chemistry Council of New Jersey and the executives who work for them are extremely concerned with New Jersey’s high energy rates,” said Hal Bozarth, executive director. “Year after year, our member companies rank high energy costs as one of their top two issues of concern, and with the potential for our rates to go up even more in response to the multi-billion dollar energy proposals in the wake of Superstorm Sandy it makes sense for us to team up with this coalition of strange bedfellows to advance these principles that all ratepayers can support and the administration should consider.”

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NJCAP is supporting the following principles:

- **Fair Prices and Reliable Service**: Just and reasonable rates – and not a dime more -- that compensate utilities for responsible investments and operating costs that ensure safe, reliable and proper service now and in the foreseeable future.
- **Accountability**: CAP supports retaining the current ratemaking structure for utilities. The traditional ratemaking structure under which the NJ Board of Public Utilities (BPU) sets rates in a rate case, properly balances utility needs and consumer protection in a manner that is most accountable and transparent.
- **Consumer Protection**: CAP calls on the NJ Board of Public Utilities to use its authority and satisfy its statutory obligation to protect the interests of New Jersey ratepayers who are being asked to spend billions of dollars for a combination of storm recovery costs and infrastructure improvements.
- **Fair Markets**: CAP supports efficient, transparent, and fair markets for consumers of utility services, with established rights and protections that promote and safeguard the health, safety, and economic interests of consumers and the state of New Jersey

“Utility ‘quick fix’ proposals like PSE&G’s Solar4ALL and Energy Strong evade regulatory scrutiny and guarantee risk-free profits to investors, leaving all the risk and expense to ratepayers. No private business would accept such an unbalanced deal from PSE&G, and neither should the state,” said Steve Goldenberg, legal counsel to NJLEUC.

"If the BPU and the governor don't tell utilities to follow the rules at the BPU which require a full, transparent and public process to request a rate hike, consumers will lose more than the chance to see their utility bills decline this year. They'll see the protections afforded them by the BPU fall victim to political negotiations that have little to do with the ratepayer concerns," added Dena Mottola Jaborska, director of Organizing and Program Development at NJCA.

NJCAP seeks to advance real solutions that will improve reliability for all electric customers, not shortsighted plans that would result in millions of dollars in profits for the utilities and leave millions of families behind. New Jerseyans cannot afford higher energy rates from multi-billion dollar energy proposals that have not been properly scrutinized or deemed necessary, effective or financially prudent.

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