

Anti-nuke group raps request

By TOM LONERGAN

Saying Detroit Edison Co. doesn't need a ratepayer's "bailout," members of a metropolitan area anti-nuclear group have urged the state Public Service Commission (PSC) to deny the electric utility's request to raise its rates.

Edison is seeking \$463 million more revenue in three steps that would total an increase of about 25 percent.

A half-dozen members of the Detroit Safe Energy Coalition (SECO) dominated a PSC public hearing last week in Farmington Hills at the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

About 20 persons attended the hearing, including three Edison representatives.

"IT NOW appears that the Detroit Edison Co. is unable to complete or maintain its waste in the marketplace without a bailout by the ratepayers," said Mary Johnston, of Farmington Hills, a member of SECO's steering committee.

She urged the PSC to deny Edison's request, conduct a "thorough review" of the utility and ban Edison public speakers from defending "the pro-nuclear attitudes of the utility."

The group is one of eight intervenors in the rate case. Others include the Southfield-based Michigan Citizens Lobby and Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley.

Responding to Ms. Johnston's page-and-a-half statement, Edison lawyer George Hogg Jr. said: "The questions she raises are complex questions and should be directed to (company) witnesses later."

The public hearing, chaired by PSC Administrative Law Judge William A. Austin, was solely for Edison customers to respond to the rate hike request. It was made a month after Edison won a record \$132 million increase from the PSC.

Austin, who will make a recommendation to the three-member commission, said evidentiary hearings will begin June 30 in Lansing. The PSC's decision is "some months away," he said.

EDISON SEEKS interim increases of

\$155 million immediately and \$162 million Jan. 1. It wants the final increase of \$146 million later next year.

The utility also wants to raise rates \$9 million a year for five consecutive years starting in 1981 to recover planning costs for its Greenwood nuclear power plant project, scrapped in March. The plant was to be adjacent to an existing oil-fired plant near Port Huron.

SECO member Robert Magnuson, of Redford Township, called the PSC hearings, "a waste of our money."

The commission, which is appointed by the governor, is "fettered by restrictive legislation which the legislature is too cowardly to address," said Magnuson, who called for an elected PSC.

"I haven't seen the public service commission clamoring to the public to support a movement to give them the powers they need," he said. The two Republican PSC commissioners didn't attend the hearing. A third, a Democrat recently appointed by Gov. William Milliken, is awaiting state Senate confirmation.

REFERRING to the Edison rate hike granted in March, Marion Ferscht, of Bloomfield Hills, asked, "Where did they make a mistake? I don't understand this projected increase they have asked for."

Hogg said Edison received some \$90 million less than it requested for 1979 rate charges. He said the utility anticipates "substantially increased" investments and operating costs for the remainder of 1980 and next year.

Steven Kaplan, of Southfield, another SECO member, questioned Edison's energy-need projections. Citing a nationwide utility publication, "Energy World," Kaplan said two years ago an

energy "oversupply" of "33 to 38 percent" was reported.

"We don't need to pay any more for something you don't need," he said.

Hogg said short-term energy needs may be decreasing due to the recession, but added the utility expects a "long-term increase in demand."

THE PENNSYLVANIA utility that owns the Three Mile Island plant, scene of last year's nuclear accident, recently passed on \$22 million in costs to ratepayers to close the damaged Three Mile Island and another plant.

That prompted David Collie, of Oak Park, to ask:

"How can we have a cost of \$463 million without an accident? I just don't understand it," said Collie, who works in Southfield.

Hogg said comparing the two situations was "like trying to compare a budget of a person living in Orlando,

Fla. to that of someone in Portland, Ore."

"I don't think you or I know enough about the general public utility cases to compare," he told Collie.

EARLIER THIS month, attorney general Kelley said he would intervene to block Edison's request.

Kelley said Edison-wants to increase rates 38 percent. The PSC said the typical residential customer (using 500 kilowatt hours of electricity a month) would see a 24 percent increase, if the entire Edison request is granted.

In a written statement, Kelley said he opposes inclusion in the rates of Edison's loss from the scrapped Greenwood nuclear project. He will also oppose Edison's request for a 15 percent return on common equity.

The utility is now allowed 13.5 percent, a figure set by the PSC nearly 10 years ago.

Frustration with the PSC was summed up at last week's hearing by Arthur Flor, a Royal Oak retiree.

"It seems like Detroit Edison, Bell Telephone and Consumers Power are going round and round with the Michigan Public Service Commission," Flor said.

"Each is in there taking their turn, it seems, three months at a time and getting their regular raise."

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