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Citizen Comment

GRU Bill Stuffer Deceives Residential Customers

Comments by Dian Deevey to Gainesville City Commission 9/6/2012

In August, GRU sent residential customers a bill stuffer that falsely claims that base rate charges for electricity have decreased in the last 3 years.

That's not true.

In fact the base rates have increased.

Here is what the first sentence of the stuffer says:

"After three consecutive years of electric base rate *decreases* there will be no change in electric prices for fiscal 2013."

The customer charge and base rates have seen increases ranging from 3% to 70% over the last three years.

The customer charge increased by 14%; the rate for the first 250 kWh increased by 70%; the rate for the 2nd tier (251 to 750 kWh) increased by 3%; the rate for the top tier (over 750 kWh) increased by 4%; and the base rate for 870 kWh increased by 11%

Few residential customers know what a "base rate" is and even fewer keep records on the rates for the last three fiscal years. So few will detect GRU's little lie.

But GRU staffers who wrote the stuffer cannot be unaware of what base rates are, or how they have increased. Ordinance 27-27 "Base Rates for Retail Service"

identifies the base rates and refers to an Appendix A where the current rates are listed.

Ordinance 27-28 describes the fuel adjustment charges, and specifies how it is to be calculated. Its first sentence is:

"A fuel adjustment shall be added to the base rate for electric service to all retail customer rate classifications as specified in the schedule set out in Appendix A. "

One must conclude that GRU's lie about the alleged decrease in base rates is deliberate. It is classic case of spin. To spin the truth, you make an assertion about a thing unfamiliar to your readers, and then lie about that thing, confident that the reader will believe your lie.

This is not the first time GRU has attempted to mislead the public about rates and other issues. These spins reflect very badly on Commissioners, and disgust the public.

But short of listening to knowledgeable citizens like me, or establishing a utility commission to run GRU, and staffing it with utility experts, I do not see what you Commissioners can realistically do. None of you knows enough about utilities or GRU to spot the lies and spins. Thank you.

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