

BEFORE THE
FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

DOCKET NO.: 20240025-E1

Petition for rate increase
by Duke Energy Florida, LLC.

PROCEEDINGS: CUSTOMER SERVICE HEARINGS

COMMISSIONERS
PARTICIPATING: CHAIRMAN MIKE LA ROSA
COMMISSIONER ANDREW GILES FAY
COMMISSIONER ART GRAHAM
COMMISSIONER GARY F. CLARK
COMMISSIONER GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

DATE: Wednesday, June 12, 2024

TIME: Commenced: 6:15 p.m.
Concluded: 9:18 p.m.

PLACE: Parks and Conservation Resources
Magnolia Room
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, Florida 33774

STENOGRAPHICALLY
REPORTED BY: MESCHELLE D. MANLEY, CSR, LCR
Court Stenographer and Florida
Notary Public

Lexitas - Tampa

JOB #365271

1 The proceedings began at approximately 6:15 p.m.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Good afternoon, everybody,
3 and welcome to this customer service hearing.
4 This is a part of the review of the Duke Energy
5 Florida's request for a rate adjustment. Today's
6 service hearing is an important part of the
7 process and is dedicated to hearing from you, the
8 customers.

9 My name is Mike La Rosa. I have the
10 privilege of serving as the Chairman here at the
11 Florida Public Service Commission. With me are my
12 fellow commissioners. I'd like to give them each
13 an opportunity just to quickly introduce
14 themselves.

15 COMMISSIONER GRAHAM: Good afternoon.
16 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I guess before I -- thank
18 you. Before I get started, I have with us
19 Ms. Cynthia, who is going to be our Spanish
20 interpreter. She's going to interpret important
21 sections of today's hearing. So I'll let her --
22 excuse me. Sorry. I'll let her go ahead and
23 start with the introductions.

24 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

25 COMMISSIONER GRAHAM: Okay. My name is Art

1 Graham. I'm one of your five public service
2 commissioners. I just wanted to take a quick
3 minute to tell you-guys that, number one, we're
4 glad to be here. We're glad that you're here. I
5 want to let you know that this is a customer
6 service meeting. This is your meeting for
7 you-guys to be heard. This is for you to tell us
8 what you think about the utilities. I don't care
9 if it's positive or if it's negative. Give us
10 your true feelings. This is the time for you to
11 do that. Tell us about your experiences with
12 customer service. We know that in Florida it's a
13 monopoly and you don't have choice of who you buy
14 utilities from, but it doesn't mean that you get
15 poor service.

16 So tell us if you've got poor service, tell
17 us if you've got great service, because we hear
18 that just as much. And tell us what you think
19 about the rate case. Once again, my name is Art
20 Graham, and I thank you very much for being here
21 this evening, afternoon and evening.

22 COMMISSIONER CLARK: My name is Gary Clark.
23 And just to echo Commissioner Graham's sentiments,
24 thank you all for being here and being a part of
25 this with us tonight. Thank you for taking time

1 out of your schedules to be here. This is a
2 very important part of the rating process,
3 rate-making process, and a part that we take very
4 seriously. So thank you for being here.

5 COMMISSIONER PASSIDOMO: I'll just echo. I'm
6 Gabriella Passidomo, another one of the five
7 commissioners. I just want to echo my colleagues
8 and thank you all for taking the time to be here.
9 We really value your feedback, and it does go into
10 our considerations when we make our ultimate
11 decisions. And so thank you, again, for taking
12 time to be here.

13 COMMISSIONER FAY: And I'm Andrew Fay. I
14 also want to thank everybody for taking time to be
15 here on a -- at 6:00 p.m., after probably a long
16 day at work. And so we do -- as you do your
17 commentary, we do intake these comments, written
18 comments, and we take them very seriously. So we
19 appreciate you taking the time to be here. Thank
20 you.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, commissioners.
22 Staff, would you please read the notice.

23 STAFF COUNSEL: By notice issued on May 24,
24 2024, this time and place has been set for a
25 customer service hearing in Docket No.

1 20240025-EI. The purpose of the meeting is more
2 fully set forth in the notice.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, Counsel.

4 Let's go ahead and move on to appearances,
5 starting off with Duke Energy.

6 MS. TRIPLET: Dianne Triplett, Duke Energy
7 Florida.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Office of Public Counsel?

9 MR. TRIERWEILER: Walt Trierweiler, the
10 public counsel. And my guys will introduce
11 themselves later.

12 Jordan Luebkemann and Bradley Marshall for
13 the League of United Latin American Citizens,
14 otherwise known as LULAC, and Florida Rising.

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Staff counsel?

16 MR. STILLER: Shaw Stiller on behalf of
17 Public Service Commission staff. I'd liked to
18 also enter an appearance for Major Thompson, my
19 co-counsel.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you. Let me begin,
21 again, by thanking you-all each for taking the
22 time out your schedule. I think my commissioners
23 have done a great job of doing that and explained
24 how important today is, and, truly, to hear the
25 quality of service provided by Duke.

1 In August, there will be a technical hearing
2 where the Commission will hear from witnesses
3 about the evidence in the case. I encourage you
4 to watch the hearing on our website, as it may
5 help you better understand our process and
6 ultimately the decisions in which we make in this
7 case. The meeting will be transcribed and will
8 become a part of the official record. As such, I
9 will swear you in before you share your comments
10 if you've not been sworn in already online.

11 Please note that your comments will also be
12 subject to cross-examination, meaning that you may
13 be asked questions by any of the parties that are
14 here today and by maybe us as commissioners, but
15 by no means is that intended to be intimidating.
16 It's just to make sure that we fully understand
17 the comments that you've made and that everything
18 is clear for the record.

19 In addition to sharing your comments here,
20 you may also provide your comments with additional
21 material by traditional mail or by email. You can
22 contact the Commission by mail, and you can find a
23 pre-addressed comment card for download on our
24 website. You can email us at
25 clerk@pse.state.fl.us. Be sure to include the

1 document number. The Docket No. is 20240025-EI.
2 Again, that's Document No. 20240025-EI. Include
3 that in the subject line so we can make sure that
4 it gets to the right place.

5 Whether your comments are made verbally today
6 or received in writing, be assured that they will
7 be reviewed and considered as part of this case.
8 So please have some confidence in the fact that we
9 will see however you decide to communicate with
10 us.

11 Lastly, if you have any specific service-
12 billing issues, Ms. Carol Cornell, Director of
13 Customer Experience for Duke and her staff is here
14 on site to assist you. She's sitting right up
15 here in the front row.

16 If you need to speak with the Commission
17 staff, Lee Smith from our economics division is
18 here today for any technical issues. Our legal
19 staff, of course, is as well. So I'll hand this
20 to the interpreter.

21 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Before we hear from the
23 customers, I'd like to give each of the parties
24 three minutes for an opening statement. We will
25 start with Duke.

1 MS. TRIPLETT: Hello, my name is Dianne
2 Triplett, and I represent Duke Energy Florida.
3 Our filing is more fully explained in the online
4 synopsis, but, in summary, we filed a rate
5 adjustment to make investments for the benefit of
6 our customers. So we are pleased to hear from
7 some of those customers today.

8 With me, again, is Carol Cornell, our
9 director of consumer affairs. We also have
10 several Duke Energy team members in attendance,
11 including a Spanish-speaking team member, and
12 we're ready to assist our customers. And if you
13 cannot meet with our representatives tonight,
14 please email consumeraffairs2@Duke-energy.com.
15 Thank you.

16 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

17 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Office of Public Counsel?

18 MR. WATROUS: First off, I'd like to enter an
19 appearance for Austin Watrous and Octavio Ponce on
20 behalf of the Public Counsel. For those of you
21 who are not familiar with our office, the Office
22 of Public Counsel was created by the Florida
23 Legislature and responsible for representing the
24 customers of Duke Energy Florida in matters before
25 the Public Service Commission.

1 THE COURT STENOGRAPHER: What was your name,
2 sir?

3 MR. WATROUS: Austin Watrous.

4 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

5 MR. WATROUS: We're here today because Duke
6 Energy has filed a request for a variety of
7 changes to their current rates. The Office of
8 Public Counsel has hired expert witnesses to
9 address multiple aspects of Duke's requested rate
10 increase. We have engaged in extensive discovery,
11 and we have deposed many of the utility's
12 witnesses in order to identify cost savings for
13 customers. We will continue deposing witnesses,
14 conducting discovery, and preparing for trial
15 right up until the date of the hearing.

16 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

17 MR. WATROUS: The utility's proposal would --
18 the utility's original proposal would result in
19 base rate increases every year for the years 2025,
20 2026, and 2027. If the original proposal is
21 accepted on January 1st, 2025, Duke's based rates
22 would be increased by 593 million dollars, 98
23 million more on January 1st of 2026, and then
24 another 129 million on January 1st of 2027. OPC
25 has challenged the legality and lack of supporting

1 evidence for these increases.

2 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

3 MR. WATROUS: Duke is entitled to a
4 reasonable return on equity; however, the utility
5 has requested an excessive rate of return on
6 equity of 11.15 percent. Our research indicates
7 that Duke only requires a return of equity of just
8 under nine and a half percent, which is consistent
9 with the current market rate for electric utility
10 operations and is more than adequate for Duke to
11 maintain its financial integrity and
12 creditworthiness.

13 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

14 MR. WATROUS: There are more issues that we
15 are challenging in this rate case to reach the
16 best possible result for customers. It's
17 important to keep in mind that the law places the
18 burden on Duke to provide the evidence to support
19 a finding that every requested dollar is both
20 reasonable and prudent. The job of your Office of
21 Public Counsel is to challenge all of those areas
22 that don't satisfy that burden.

23 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

24 MR. WATROUS: Please remember that today is
25 your hearing. It's not the Commission's hearing,

1 it's not my hearing, and it's not Duke's hearing.
2 This is your customer hearing, and your sworn
3 testimony is evidence, not idle commentary.
4 Please take advantage of this opportunity. Please
5 use your voice to participate. Walt Trierweiler,
6 Public Counsel, thanks you for being here today.

7 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Florida Rising and LULAC?

9 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 (Speaking in Spanish to the interpreter.)

11 THE INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish.)

12 Okay.

13 MR. LUEBKEMANN: Jordan Luebkekmann for
14 Florida Rising and LULAC, the League of United
15 Latin American Citizens. Duke had the fifth
16 highest residential bills in the nation last year
17 out of 149 utilities with more than 100,000
18 residential customers, yet Duke is here now asking
19 to raise rates even higher. Duke's proposal
20 includes a minimum bill, a substantial rate
21 increase, and a big hike in their return on
22 equity -- basically, guaranteed profits -- which
23 would be applied to a wave of construction
24 projects that Duke has not shown are needed. All
25 told, if authorized by the Commission, over the

1 next three years, Duke will charge customers over
2 2 billion dollars more than you are already
3 paying.

4 Florida Rising and LULAC, as associations of
5 residential customers, are in this case to push
6 back against this excessive increase. The \$30
7 minimum bill in Duke's petition functions like a
8 high fixed charge. In practice, it means that no
9 matter how much electricity you save, your bill
10 will never be less than \$30. The mechanism
11 punishes low energy users like those who have
12 invested in energy efficiency or who leave the
13 thermostat higher than its comfortable in order to
14 save on bills. It's also regressive, as it
15 primarily impacts low- and fixed-income households
16 who can least afford to manage extra charges --
17 extra charges.

18 Duke argues the high charge is necessary
19 because as a utility, they have many fixed costs,
20 but other high fixed-cost businesses don't impose
21 fixed charges at all. When was the last time you
22 paid a monthly subscription for an airline or a
23 mall? Duke's documents show the true and fair
24 fixed charge should be no more than \$14 a month.

25 Then there's the excessive return on equity,

1 or ROE, that Duke is seeking. ROE refers to how
2 much profit Duke is allowed to charge customers
3 for each dollar of shareholder money spent on new
4 grid infrastructure. The real cost of these
5 projects does not change with Duke's ROE. You
6 just get the privilege of paying extra for the
7 same stuff that Duke is authorized to earn a
8 higher ROE.

9 In this case, Duke's request of 11.15 percent
10 midpoint and 12.15 percent maximum stick out
11 against a decades-long trend of lower ROE's across
12 the nation. An ROE exists to ensure that a
13 utility makes just enough profit that it can
14 continue to attract investors and fund future
15 projects. The reason that ROEs have been going
16 down is that utility commissions all across the
17 country recognize there's just not that much risk
18 in investing in a monopoly utility with no
19 competition and guaranteed profits.

20 Another major driver of Duke's requested rate
21 hike is a \$3.3 billion dollar spending spree on
22 new transmission, generation, and distribution
23 projects. While some of the spending may be
24 reasonable, the fact is that Duke has not
25 demonstrated the actual need for many of these

1 projects and hasn't performed a transparent robust
2 benefit cost analysis for virtually any of them.
3 This is no way to let a utility spend your money.

4 The Commission should deny all new projects
5 unless and until Duke shows them each to be
6 necessary to serve the system, and that Duke will
7 accomplish them in a way that minimizes customer
8 expense instead of maximizing Duke's profits.
9 Thank you.

10 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you to the parties.
12 Are there any -- before we get into the witness --
13 or the customer testimony, are there any public
14 officials that are in the room that would like to
15 come speak? I normally give elected officials the
16 opportunity to speak first.

17 I'm not seeing any and I didn't see any
18 indicated on the list. Okay. So let's go ahead
19 and get started. To make sure that all of your
20 neighbors have enough time to speak -- I know the
21 list is growing as we're going on -- I'm not
22 checking my phone -- well, I am checking my phone,
23 but I'm looking at it, as more names come. I'm
24 getting it digitally here. So I'm certainly not
25 playing games or anything. But just to make sure

1 that everyone has enough time, let's give about
2 five minutes -- let's give it about five minutes
3 per comment. I'll try not to cut you off,
4 especially if you're mid-thought on something.

5 With us -- you've already met our public
6 counsel, Mr. Walt Trierweiler, Austin Watrous, and
7 Mr. Ponce next to him. They are your voice in
8 this process. They're going to be helping me out
9 today as we call up speakers. I'm going to ask
10 them to call up groups of three. If you hear your
11 name in that group, that means you're on deck and
12 be ready. So please don't be shy to make your way
13 towards the microphone so that we can keep the
14 process moving as quickly as we can.

15 So I have a list of folks that are
16 preregistered online. Those folks have selected a
17 button that affirms that they are sworn in. Those
18 that have signed up here in person have not been
19 sworn in. So, in fact, let me pause there and let
20 me allow for a translation.

21 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I'll ask you, if you
23 signed up today and have not been sworn in, which
24 means you did not sign up online, do you mind
25 please standing and raising your right hand.

1 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Do you swear and affirm
3 that you will present the truth in this matter and
4 that you are a customer of Duke.

5 (Interpreter translating in Spanish.)

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: (Collectively) Yes.

7 (All potential speakers were duly sworn by
8 Chairman La Rosa in person or by online
9 confirmation prior to the hearing.)

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are we going to have
11 enough time with the Spanish translation? Can she
12 speak a bit quicker so that everyone can speak and
13 get their five minutes?

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: So moving forward, the
15 only translation that we're going to have is going
16 to be a Spanish speaker translating to English.
17 So we'll kind of reverse it. So if you're
18 speaking English to us, then that will not be
19 translated.

20 All right. I'll go ahead and throw it to
21 Mr. Watrous to call out our first three names.

22 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
23 provide sworn witness testimony are: Michelle
24 Cyr, William Herrmann, and Martha Lenderman.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Michelle Cyr, you're

1 recognized as soon as you get a microphone, I
2 believe.

3 MS. CYR: All right. Thank you so much. My
4 name is Michelle Cyr, and I am a Duke Energy
5 customer, a caregiver, and a member of the AARP
6 Florida team. I'm honored to work on behalf of
7 Tampa Bay's 50-plus residents and their families.
8 Many of the seniors that I come across day to day
9 in our communities already struggle with the
10 rising cost of medicine, food, and housing.

11 I'm here today to express my concerns about
12 Duke Energy's proposed rate increase. This
13 request seems driven by corporate greed,
14 especially given their return on equity of 11.15
15 percent, well above the national average and
16 higher than what they seek in other states with
17 active rate increase cases.

18 As a household of five with a pool, our
19 monthly usage is well over a thousand kilowatts
20 per month. We have already made considerable
21 efforts to reduce our energy usage to keep our
22 bills manageable; however, the proposed increase
23 in the fixed customer charge and return on equity
24 would undermine those efforts. My household will
25 see a much higher increase than the dollar figures

1 discussed based on the thousand kilowatts.

2 I urge the Commission to closely scrutinize
3 this request to ensure fairness and protect
4 customers from unjust rate hikes. Thank you for
5 your attention to this important matter.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you. Commissioners,
7 if there are any questions -- or parties -- any
8 questions of the speakers, just get my attention.
9 Thank you.

10 Mr. Herrmann, you're recognized when you're
11 ready.

12 MR. HERRMANN: Thank you. Good evening. My
13 name is Bill Herrmann. I live at 130 4th Avenue
14 North, and I have been sworn. When I first read
15 that Duke was asking for a total base rate
16 increase of \$820 million dollars, an increase of
17 28.7 percent over three years, my immediate
18 reaction was, Wow, that's healthy.

19 So where is this rate increase going? The
20 request would increase Duke's allowable profit,
21 their return on equity, to 11.5 percent, which is
22 above the national average of 9.7. So where is
23 the money going? One of the things the rate
24 increase is paying for is lobbying efforts that
25 serve utility companies. Stated differently,

1 their bumping our rates so they can fund lobbying
2 to increase their profits.

3 There is a claim that the rate increase will
4 help improve Duke's distribution network. As the
5 Office of Public Counsel kind of alluded to,
6 that's kind of -- that's hyperbole. If there was
7 a clear condition of a reasonable rate increase
8 with a clear need to harden the system and all
9 funds were going to be used for that, you know, it
10 would almost be palpable, but that's not the case
11 here.

12 The reality is that our rates are going to
13 increase their return on equity, which begs the
14 question: What's equity? The standard definition
15 of equity is the amount of money that a company
16 owner has put into the firm. Straight forward,
17 who's got the cash in? The only equity in this
18 firm is the stockholders. Nobody else. They're
19 the ones who put the initial cash up.

20 When they had the first offering, they issued
21 treasury stock. People had a college degree --
22 some education on this. Those are equity holders,
23 and, of course, the bondholders. The stockholders
24 are getting a 4 percent -- I'll say that again --
25 a 4 percent return on their investment. Not 9,

1 not 11. The stock market has set that as a
2 reasonable rate of return.

3 We, the rate payers, are the ones who hold
4 the assets here. Every foot of cable, every inch
5 of service dropped, every meter hanging on the
6 wall, was paid for by us, the rate payers, not
7 the executives who are going to benefit from this
8 with an improved return.

9 Ladies and gentlemen, let's be honest here.
10 Let's call this what it is. Duke Energy wants to
11 increase their profits. They want to line their
12 pockets with our money through this excessive rate
13 increase. The excessive and unnecessary increase
14 comes at the expense of those who can least afford
15 it. I'm sure we can all agree that with our
16 feels-like temperature hits 90 degrees,
17 air-conditioning is a life-essential utility,
18 especially for seniors.

19 In the State with the second largest
20 concentration of retirees in the country, many
21 senior citizens are going to be faced with some
22 hard choices. Even if they reduce their bill --
23 because this is in the base charge; right? So
24 even if they reduce their bills and sit in the
25 dark with just the A/C on, they're going to have a

1 healthy rate increase.

2 So the question becomes: Do they pay the
3 electric bill, or do they buy blood pressure
4 medicine or other essentials? Do they pay the
5 electric bill or the rent? And for some, it's
6 going to be a hard choice: Do I pay the electric
7 bill, or do I just skip some meals so I can afford
8 to pay the bill.

9 My summary is simple. Ask yourself, what is
10 fair? Ask yourself, what does your moral compass
11 deep down inside say? As someone with 37 years of
12 utility experience, including rate making, this
13 hike just rubs me wrong, in part because the hit
14 is on the base rate. So no matter how much people
15 save or how much they sit in the dark, their bill
16 is going to go up.

17 Now, some are going to say: Well, hey, this
18 is the PSC. We must make fair and reasonable
19 decisions that follow the facts. Let's follow the
20 facts. Is it fair and reasonable to increase the
21 base rates by 29 percent to fund the highest
22 return on equity in the country? Fair and
23 reasonable to raise those rates 29 percent to fund
24 corporate lobbying? Fair and reasonable to raise
25 the rates 29 percent, thereby burdening seniors on

1 a fixed income for an increase that is not purely
2 driven by increased operating expenses?

3 The facts support only one fair and
4 reasonable decision from the PSC, and that is to
5 deny this increased rate of return. Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you. Martha --

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can we turn the podium
8 sideways so that everybody can hear and the
9 person's back isn't turned to us?

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: So the intentions of
11 customers providing testimony is to provide
12 testimony to us. And I understand everyone wants
13 to hear them, and they are being transcribed. But
14 at the end of the day, it's important that we hear
15 them -- right? -- because we have to ultimately
16 make the decision. So I'd prefer to keep it the
17 way it is.

18 Ms. Martha Lenderman, you are recognized.

19 MS. LENDERMAN: Thank you so much and thank
20 you for allowing us to speak here. I'm a Florida
21 native, I guess one of the few around, and I
22 remember when our homes, our cars, our offices,
23 our schools, had no air conditioning. Our power
24 bills were very low, but it was no way to live.
25 It was miserable. I remember people talking

1 about, Oh, you had windows you could open for
2 cross-ventilation. But when it's 90-something
3 degrees and 90 percent humidity, it doesn't help.

4 I sold my three-bedroom, two-bath house in
5 Dunedin, with a pool, a year ago. My average Duke
6 bill was about \$135 a month, and that was after
7 replacing an old A/C with a heat pump. I moved to
8 a two-bedroom, two-bath 1100 square foot apartment
9 in St. Pete where my last utility bill was \$68.
10 The two months before, it was \$71 and \$60,
11 respectively. I expect it will go up as the
12 temperature gets warmer.

13 But I broke down my \$68 bill over the 30
14 days, and it was \$2.26 a day. And I could walk
15 through my apartment -- you know, we take our
16 utilities, electricity, rather -- we expect it to
17 be there always. But I looked around. My ceiling
18 fans were on; my A/C cooled my apartment. I
19 refrigerated my food so it wouldn't spoil. It
20 cooked my meals; it brewed my morning coffee; it
21 provided hot water for showers and laundry; it ran
22 my dishwasher; it lit up my apartment.

23 It operated my desktop computer, my printer,
24 the television, and the Internet; it charged my
25 cell phone, my iPad, and my land line phone

1 instrument, and I vacuumed my house. That doesn't
2 happen every day. I'll guarantee you. But for
3 \$2.26 [verbatim]. I'm not willing to give up any
4 of those necessities for which I only pay \$2.26 a
5 day. I can't even buy a cup of coffee for \$2.26.

6 As a Florida native, I have experienced
7 severe weather over my lifetime. I've had to live
8 without power on rare occasions for hours or even
9 days. I've always been impressed following the
10 natural disasters when I see the news photos or
11 even in person seeing the utility trucks lined up
12 driving into the disaster area or being staged at
13 the ballparks. I am just waiting for them to turn
14 the power back on as soon as possible. And we
15 need to be grateful for that, that we have that
16 available.

17 Our utilities are necessities. They're not
18 luxuries. Current and proposed rates should be
19 closely examined and fully justified before its
20 costs are passed onto it's customers. And like
21 all other customers, I don't really want to pay
22 more for anything, even utilities. However, you
23 might wonder: Am I supporting or opposing this?
24 I think I trust that the Public Service Commission
25 has some pretty highly qualified professionals

1 that can crunch numbers. If the rate increase is
2 warranted, I fully support it.

3 I'm here to talk about the value I get for
4 the money I spend and the service and the quality
5 of service I have gotten from Duke, or Florida
6 Power before that. Or however many companies have
7 had it during the years. But I have received
8 excellent service, and for \$2.26 a day, it's a
9 deal.

10 Thank you for allowing me to speak. If you
11 have questions . . .

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
13 testimony.

14 Mr. Watrous, the next three.

15 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
16 provide sworn testimony are: Gary Holman, Mary
17 Schoonover, and Chante Jones.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Holman, you're
19 recognized when you're ready. Is Mr. Holman in
20 the room?

21 (No response.)

22 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. I'm not seeing
23 Mr. Holman.

24 Mary Schoonover? Mary Schoonover?

25 (No response.)

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I'm not seeing
2 Ms. Schoonover. And I'll come back to these names
3 towards the end.

4 Chante Jones? Madam, you're recognized when
5 you're ready. I've noticed when you hold the
6 microphone close, you can hear it much louder.

7 MS. JONES: Okay. Thank you. Hello, I'm
8 Chante Jones, Associate State Director of Advocacy
9 for AARP and a Duke Energy customer. AARP,
10 represented as members, many of whom are Duke
11 customers, have conducted a thorough review of the
12 Duke Energy Florida's rate increase request.

13 Many our members are on low income, fixed
14 income, often living on social security alone. As
15 the cost of Florida -- living in Florida continues
16 to rise, especially for property insurance,
17 housing expenses, the unnecessary increase in
18 utility rates could decrease the quality of life
19 for many seniors.

20 Our specific concerns are as follows: One,
21 the 11.15 return on equity that we kind of heard
22 about a lot today, this evening. Duke's request
23 for this 11.15 percent return is a primary driver
24 for the massive increase, and it's far above what
25 we're seeing nationally at 9.71 percent. This is

1 pure profit for Duke. They should not be allowed
2 to increase their profits on the backs of our
3 residential customers.

4 By contrast, Duke Energy Indiana and Duke
5 Energy Carolinas requested 10.5 in their pending
6 rate case filings currently. In fact, on May 19th
7 of this year, Duke Energy Carolinas reached a
8 settlement agreement that provides only a 9.94
9 return on equity. So there's no reason that Duke
10 Energy needs to have a higher return in their
11 operating companies in other states, and the
12 Commission should not grant Duke this higher
13 return compared to commissions, other commissions,
14 nor Duke itself asking for it in other states it
15 serves [verbatim].

16 The second item we're concerned [verbatim] is
17 the increase of the customer, the fixed customer
18 charge. Duke already has that \$30 minimum charge
19 and a \$12.89 customer charge. AARP opposed the
20 increase of \$15.13 by 2027. This charge is
21 unrelated to usage, so controlling the electric
22 bill would be very difficult. Customers are
23 unable to take proactive steps to reduce the cost
24 by buying energy-efficient appliances, utilizing
25 energy-efficient saving tips that are promoted by

1 the company. Customers already pay enough for
2 this fixed customer fee.

3 The third item is the increase in the base
4 rate. If you do not reduce the amount requested
5 in the base rate, customers can expect an increase
6 of \$24.14 or a 28.7 percent increase per month by
7 January of 2027. This dollar increase is based on
8 a thousand kilowatt usage according to EnergySage
9 as of June 9, 2024. The average Floridian uses
10 1,485 kilowatts usage [verbatim] of electricity
11 every month. So this monthly average will be
12 higher for most customers. This is an exorbitant
13 increase. It is unnecessary. In addition, Duke
14 has already eight riders that increase rates
15 outside of the base rate, so this increase should
16 reflect that.

17 While we know that the various riders can
18 fluctuate due to a volatile fuel market or various
19 storm recovery efforts, it's critical that we
20 limit -- that you limit the increases that can be
21 controlled. It's essential that the Commission
22 carefully examine the evidence presented to ensure
23 the customer's best interest is put first. We ask
24 that the commissioners highly evaluate, even
25 scrutinize, the request of Duke and put their

1 customers above profit even when they do not.

2 AARP appreciates this opportunity to comment.

3 Thank you so much.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
5 testimony.

6 Let's go to the next three.

7 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers
8 providing sworn testimony are: Julia Herbst,
9 Nathaniel Lyon, and Theodor Andresen.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Julia Herbst, you're
11 recognized when you're ready.

12 MS. HERBST: Good evening. My name is Julia
13 Herbst. I'm a Duke customer from Tarpon Springs,
14 and I'm also a solar owner. Thank you for the
15 opportunity to comment on the rate hikes in a
16 public hearing, and thank you for listening to
17 comments from some of the two million people
18 affected by your decisions and your regulations.

19 I urge the Public Service Commission to
20 reject the rate increase from Duke. These
21 increases will result in a financial crisis for
22 Floridians. Duke Florida's electric bills are
23 already the fifth highest in the nation for
24 utilities of a similar size or larger, and these
25 bills are going to continue to rise as our

1 temperatures, our storms, and our power needs
2 increase.

3 I'm quoting the PSC service rate case
4 overview: Duke Energy Florida is requesting a
5 rate increase to recover the cost of operating the
6 utility and allow the company an opportunity to
7 earn a fair rate of return on its investment.
8 Regarding the cost of operating the utility,
9 instead of raising rates to cover operations, Duke
10 should be do doing more to lower operational and
11 customer costs through a rapid-wide deployment of
12 energy-efficiency measures, diversifying its
13 generation fuel to stable, native Florida fuel --
14 sunshine -- and encouraging more customers to
15 install their own solar.

16 These moves reduce the burden on the grid,
17 lower peak demand, and reduce the cost of
18 operating the utility. By advocating for massive
19 expansion of energy-efficiency programs, the PSC
20 can promote a future that reduces energy bills and
21 enhances affordability for all Floridians,
22 especially now at a time when customers are
23 literally sacrificing medicine or food or
24 tolerating excessive heat to pay their Duke bill.

25 We need all options to lower utility bills,

1 not raise them, including not metering.

2 Encouraging customer-owned solar with a fair net
3 metering credit also benefits our grid and lowers
4 costs for Duke and, therefore, all customers.

5 Ninety (phonetic) percent of Florida voters
6 support fair retail credit for net metering. We,
7 solar owners, use our own private property and our
8 private hard-earned money to invest in lowering
9 our energy consumption while also sharing our
10 extra locally produced electrons with our
11 neighbors at times of highest demand.

12 This reduces strain on the grid at times when
13 it's most expensive to produce power and when
14 moving that electricity far distances meets waste
15 and line losses in summer high temperatures.

16 Solar homeowners save on their power bills and
17 utilities resell the power for a profit.

18 Protecting that meter makes tremendous economic
19 sense. It improves the state as a whole as an
20 important local industry, and it provides
21 households with tremendous savings.

22 To address that cost of operating the
23 utility, I urge you to support energy-efficiency
24 measures and policies, like eliminating the
25 minimal bill, offering a fair credit for excess

1 power shared with nearby customers, and reducing
2 all limits and barriers to customer renewable
3 energy adoption, including interconnection instead
4 of green lighting unnecessary construction
5 projects.

6 Regarding the fair rate of return on its
7 investment: Its investment? The utility system
8 is built with our dollars. It's customers' money
9 that built the grid, and it is our investment, not
10 just some monopoly corporations. These rate
11 requests are not fair. Duke's \$30 minimum bill is
12 unfair, and this commission should not allow the
13 minimum bill to continue. Minimum bills target
14 customers who are doing the right thing: Lowering
15 their usage to very little electricity each month.
16 It's unfair to people with energy-efficient homes,
17 part-time residents, and residents who wish to
18 retire and stay in their Florida homes with a
19 limited income.

20 Minimum bills are unfair to solar owners who
21 have used their own money to install an appliance
22 to save energy. Tripling the base rate for solar
23 owners who net little to no electricity use
24 through a year is an attack on our right to save
25 energy. Using my own earned net-metered credits

1 from electricity, I've produced, locally,
2 electricity that Duke charges my neighbors full
3 rates for even though they didn't generate it or
4 deliver it, and then hitting me with a minimum
5 bill is double-dipping and stealing from mine and
6 other solar owners' investments.

7 The rate of return is unfair. It is not
8 reasonable. It is not prudent. Duke has
9 requested rates with a guaranteed risk-free rate
10 of return above 11 percent, significantly higher
11 than utility average last year. This rate of
12 return means utility executives are getting richer
13 paid by -- paid for by the shrinking wallets of
14 hardworking Floridians.

15 At a time when Floridians are experiencing
16 rising inflation and high costs, we must protect
17 them from utility rate hikes that result in
18 additional hardship. Do not increase the burden
19 on our 2 million retail Duke customers. These
20 are people, not just customers. They are our
21 neighbors and our colleagues and our fellow
22 voters. Do not add to their costs for an
23 essential life service to pay for the bulging
24 wealth of monopoly executives. Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your

1 testimony.

2 Next up is Nathaniel Lyon. Mr. Lyon, you're
3 recognized when you're ready.

4 MR. LYON: My name is Nathaniel Lyon, a Duke
5 Energy customer. This rate hike is far greater
6 than historic rate hikes. Duke is
7 disproportionately burdening today's citizens at a
8 time when the cost of living is already
9 astronomical. Duke Energy had a net profit of
10 over \$3 billion last year, and you come here to
11 ask for more money?

12 They continue to make excessive profits and
13 pad their pockets. They made enough profit last
14 year alone to strength the grid, as they say.
15 They will, but how can we trust them? They've
16 raised rates before and failed to follow through
17 with their promises.

18 Our rates are already higher than any other
19 utility rate in Florida, and they're asking for
20 more of our hard-earned money so that they can pay
21 their shareholders even more? This is greed.
22 This is corruption. Your job is to provide your
23 customers with affordable energy. You're the
24 least affordable option in Florida. Duke Energy
25 is failing its customers, and this money-grabbing

1 request is wrong. And I ask the Commission to
2 please reject their request to increase our rates.
3 We're already paying them more than we should and
4 more than we can afford. Thank you for your time.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
6 testimony. Next up is Theodor Andresen.
7 Mr. Andresen, you're recognized when you're ready.

8 MR. ANDRESEN: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate
9 the opportunity to speak to the Commissioners. I
10 actually worked for the Public Service Commission
11 when the docket number began with 1171980
12 (phonetic). That was during the Graham
13 administration.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: That was a little bit of
15 time ago.

16 MR. ANDRESEN: And at that time, I worked on
17 as a scientific programmer, and I worked on the
18 docket system, which everybody uses and
19 occasionally crashes. So I just wanted to share
20 that with you, and it's still behaving the same.
21 So that's positive, I guess.

22 I am a nuclear physicist. That's my
23 background. I worked at Honeywell Aerospace and
24 did space guidance navigation, and I worked in
25 biomechanics, and I've got a really analytical

1 background. I generate more energy over the
2 yearly cycle than I use, yet Duke buys my energy
3 at three cents a kilowatt hour and then sells it
4 to my neighbor for ten cents a kilowatt hour. Is
5 that ethical? Does that make sense to you? It
6 doesn't make sense to me.

7 When I worked for Major Prumes (phonetic),
8 our ROI was running about ten percent. We never
9 were allowed to make over ten percent. So
10 eleven-and-a-quarter percent, that's excessive.
11 After I left PSC, I went down to St. Pete. I
12 lived here, and I worked for the FPL at their
13 energy control center where they monitor their
14 grid. I thought it was very sophisticated,
15 well-managed, and I actually think they did a good
16 job. And I think that Duke does a a good job at
17 managing the grid.

18 So I'm pretty satisfied with the minimal
19 number of failures that we experience even during
20 hurricanes, but I feel bad for the people that I
21 support. That is 22.8 percent of Floridians who
22 live below the poverty level. These people don't
23 need a rate of burden on them. These people
24 really need our help. I help them as much as I
25 can financially, and I think ethically the PSC

1 should consider them when they come to deciding
2 whether they're going to allow Duke to get eleven-
3 and-a-quarter percent profit on their investment.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
6 testimony. Let's go to the next three names.

7 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers who
8 are providing sworn testimony are Frank
9 Neugebauer, Patricia Kirby, and Sirena Jones.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Neugebauer? Is
11 Mr. Neugebauer in the room?

12 (No response.)

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I'm not seeing
14 Mr. Neugebauer. Patricia Kirby? Patricia Kirby?
15 Madam, you're recognized when you're ready.

16 MS. KIRBY: Thank you so much. And thank
17 you, also, for the opportunity you're giving
18 people for you to be able to listen to us speak
19 our truth to you.

20 So my name is Patricia Kirby. I am a Duke
21 Energy customer. I was born at MacDill Air Force
22 base, so I am also one of those rare Florida
23 natives. I am also opposed to any rate increase.
24 From what I'm reading, they have already raised
25 the rate 40 percent -- almost 40 percent over the

1 past few years. So it's a lot.

2 I'm going to go off track a little bit. I am
3 also opposed to the reasons for the rate increase,
4 one of which, I understand, is doing
5 infrastructure maintenance, the bigger poles that
6 they are putting in, protecting those bigger poles
7 by cutting down so many of our trees along those
8 transmission lines. We have a huge problem here
9 in Pinellas County and the City of Clearwater and
10 St. Petersburg, Palm Harbor, Bonita, with them
11 chopping and going into peoples' front yards,
12 their back yards, and removing those gigantic
13 trees thinking they are actually a threat to these
14 huge poles.

15 I'm not talking about the dispersal lines.
16 I'm talking about the larger transmission lines.
17 They are chopping down the trees. People are
18 losing their native, mature trees. Their
19 electricity rates are going up tremendously based
20 on so much more heat. The neighborhoods are
21 hotter. They're uglier. The whole canopy is gone
22 off the road, and they're giving us the bill.
23 It's awful.

24 I have been -- spoken at so many city council
25 meetings and so many county commission meetings

1 about this in the past few months. So that's one
2 part of it. My electric bill, which
3 coincidentally, I received today by email is \$144
4 for the past month. In 2018, my bill for 811
5 kilowatts of electricity was \$126. My bill this
6 month for 733 -- so almost 100 kilowatts less of
7 electricity -- was \$144.

8 I want to say I have animals that I rescued
9 from the county kill shelter when I volunteered at
10 the kill shelter. I pulled those animals off of
11 the euthanasia list because nobody else wanted
12 them. Nobody wanted to adopt them. Nobody wanted
13 to rescue them, not even the rescue. Nobody would
14 take them. I took them home, rehabilitated them
15 where I could, and adopted them out, but I still
16 have a bunch of these animals. And I love them,
17 but we're on a shoestring budget.

18 I don't have cable TV; I don't have a
19 television; I don't have a dishwasher; I don't
20 even have a data plan on my phone. It's talk and
21 text only. We save money everywhere we can. Our
22 thermostat in the summertime is set between 80 and
23 82 degrees for air-conditioning, 78 degrees at
24 night. Winter heat is set on 60 degrees. In
25 other words -- I know it's chilly, you-guys. I

1 let those animals develop their little winter
2 coat, and I have a couple of heating pads out.

3 I want to ask why are they planning this
4 increase when they are already making multiple
5 billion dollars in profits? Why are they cutting
6 our trees down when they don't even impose a
7 safety hazard? There's no record of any one of
8 these big trees, actually, that I know of, taking
9 down one of these big poles, and they're still
10 chopping them down. That's a lot of money. They
11 could save a lot of money by going back to just
12 trimming the trees instead of chopping them down.
13 That's one part.

14 I feel like Duke doesn't care about their
15 customers. I feel like they ride homeowners when
16 they're cutting down the trees. It's unfortunate,
17 but I keep seeing it, and I hear it from people.
18 I feel like they don't care who they make suffer
19 more by charging more money. I feel like they
20 don't care about the trees being cut down. I feel
21 like all they care about is profit. I feel like
22 money is their God and greed is their religion,
23 and I'm asking you as a resident of this county to
24 deny the rate increase. Tell them to return to
25 return to the past practice of tree trimming

1 instead of cutting our trees down.

2 And most of all, I just want to say from my
3 heart you have our future in your hands, every one
4 of you. Please, please, please, listen to the
5 people that are talking with you today. I really
6 mean it. We're asking you from our hearts, from
7 our hearts and souls, to make a good decision here
8 for the people and not just for this company that
9 already is making such enormous profits. Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
12 testimony. Next up is Sirena Jones. Sirena
13 Jones? Sirena Jones in the room?

14 (No response.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Not seeing Sirena, let's
16 move to the next three names.

17 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
18 provide sworn testimony are Joshua Sproat, David
19 Harbeitner, and Brook Ward.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Joshua Sproat? Joshua
21 Sproat?

22 (No response.)

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. David Harbeitner?

24 MR. HARBEITNER: I just want to say thanks to
25 you-guys. I also know Josh, so I know he's not

1 here tonight. He's actually on vacation out of
2 town.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Thanks.

4 MR. HARBEITNER: So I appreciate you-guys
5 coming to our community and hearing from us
6 personally. My name is David Harbeitner. I live
7 in St. Petersburg at 225 9th Avenue North. I've
8 been a Duke rate payer since 2012.
9 Professionally, I'm an investment adviser, also an
10 active Sierra Club member locally. I have solar
11 power on my roof since 2016. I'm also an EV
12 driver since 2017.

13 Having said all that, energy efficiency goals
14 were reduced in 2014 by 90 percent. We have to
15 acknowledge that the best rate reduction strategy
16 that is available in terms of reducing expense to
17 rate payers is to improve energy efficiency. To
18 summarize, I'd prefer to see us increasing the
19 amount of energy efficiency that Duke is proposing
20 and helping us with as opposed to doing what we're
21 doing, which is seeking just rate increases, not
22 considering how we reduce the load.

23 Second, over-reliance on fossil fuel as our
24 energy choice. I pull on the retirement of coal
25 plants that Duke has undertaken, but we need to

1 accelerate that action. Additionally, gas, as a
2 percentage, is too high. Part of the Sabal
3 pipeline, which brings gas into Florida, the
4 utilities, is actually owned by Duke. This is a
5 direct conflict of interest in that the gas that
6 they're using, they're also getting a profit on
7 bringing that gas into our community.

8 It's great to see the commitment to renewable
9 and solar generation by Duke; however, I did want
10 to comment that penalizing distributed solar
11 users -- i.e., rooftop solar by businesses or
12 residents -- with the implementation of a bill --
13 a minimum bill requirement of up to \$30.00, plus
14 charges, so that happens to hit me sometimes.
15 It's actually 35-plus dollars at a minimum by the
16 time you work in fees and taxes. It's not
17 disclosed in the current RS1, the document that
18 comes and shows periodically what your rates are
19 and the fuel charges are there. It doesn't even
20 mention a minimal bill.

21 Additionally, all distributed solar
22 production, similar to energy efficiency, directly
23 reduces demand at all times, peak and non-peak
24 periods. This should be incentivized. Right now,
25 there is no incentive for Duke to encourage users,

1 whether it be resident or commercial, to reduce or
2 increase the amount of power that they produce
3 locally in their own space.

4 Additionally, the State stopped rebates to
5 rate payers for this common-sense activity over
6 ten years ago. Presently, Duke and all other
7 monopoly power providers receive 100 percent
8 recovery for fuel costs. This puts rate payers at
9 the complete mercy of the market for the cost of
10 the electricity that we don't even choose. There
11 are several issues with this. It was commented as
12 a moral hazard, as a Colorado Energy Commissioner
13 testified at a Maryland Public Utility rate case a
14 number of years ago, as there is no incentive or
15 penalty on how they act in the market. That
16 entire market risk is born by us, the rate payer.

17 Additionally, as a part owner of the Sabal
18 Trail pipeline again, they get paid by rate payers
19 to receive the fuel they sell at full recovery of
20 the cost. Again, there's just a moral hazard
21 here. There's no incentive on Duke to do the
22 right thing in terms of how they protect rate
23 payers. At a minimum, they should have a modest,
24 let's even say a 10 percent risk, for the purchase
25 decisions they make for rate payers on their fuel.

1 Lastly, on this topic, a paper published in
2 April of 2023, titled "Decoding Fuel Costs and
3 Electric Bills," compared the major Florida energy
4 providers and cited Duke rate payers experiencing
5 the highest fuel portion of our energy bills.
6 Again, a recognition to Duke, relative to even the
7 other providers in the state, is doing a less
8 effective job in terms of how they're managing
9 their fuel costs that are being passed on 100
10 percent to the rate payers. To summarize, solar
11 power, both utility scale and distributed, to be
12 increased is a more stable source of fuel by also
13 reducing demand at the utility level.

14 Next point: The concerns around the customer
15 charge. As we've heard, the present base charge
16 per RS1 -- actually, I want to reflect back. It's
17 1289 right now, but in January of '17 it was 47
18 percent less. So in the last seven years, we've
19 had a 47 percent increase. I think we all
20 presently experience inflation. I don't think we
21 would say we've had a 47 percent increase across
22 all goods, yet that's what we have seen at the
23 customer service charge. The proposed increase
24 over the next 3 years is 19.8 percent including a
25 15.28 percent increase in year one. Again, this

1 increase is substantially a part of the
2 anticipated inflation rates over the same period.
3 We heard today inflation is currently running at 3
4 percent. What justifies an increase in one year
5 of over 12 percent let alone a three year of over
6 15? And I want to restate the existence of a
7 minimum bill request requirement. Interestingly,
8 we recently renovated an holder home in our
9 neighborhood that was vacant for 18 plus months.
10 But, you know, for roughly 15 months, it had no
11 tenants, was under renovation, was essentially
12 using zero power outside of tools that might have
13 been running at any given point of time, and the
14 power use was minimal. Yet we were required to
15 pay a monthly fee of -- you got it -- \$30.00 plus
16 the fees. That's without running A/C or anything
17 else.

18 So in summary, sufficient increases in the
19 customer service charge have already occurred.
20 The requested increase is excessive and should be
21 reduced and/or eliminated. Additionally, the
22 minimum bill charge penalizes those who have
23 reduced demand on Duke and the grid and should be
24 reevaluated and/or reduced.

25 Next point: The requested increase of their

1 approved rate of return on common equity to 11.15
2 percent is excessive and inappropriate. Again, I
3 mentioned I was an investment advisor. I happened
4 to look at the Investor Business Daily just to
5 see, well, what does Duke look like relative to
6 their competition. Duke Energy, the company, has
7 a pre-taxed profit margin of 17 percent at their
8 present rate of return. This is more than
9 adequate in today's capital market.

10 As a comparison, competitors' profit
11 margins -- and I just selected a few: Exelon is
12 at 13 percent; Southern Current, 17 percent;
13 NextEra -- and this is NextEra Energy, so Florida
14 Power & Light -- is at 22 percent; and Ameren is
15 at just under 10 percent. So we see that Duke at
16 17 percent are more than compensated in terms of
17 the profit margins that they're making inside of
18 their own marketplace. So in summary here, their
19 rate of return as set today is more than adequate
20 and their request to increase rate payer
21 contribution to their shareholders' profits should
22 be denied.

23 Lastly, specifically on the local service
24 issues, it's great that we have power and the
25 reliability that is present, but there are some

1 concerns in terms of what we see inside the
2 neighborhood. I'm blessed to live in a community
3 with significant tree cover, i.e, shade, and I
4 think any of us who live in Florida really
5 appreciate shade at this time of year. I happened
6 to walk into downtown St. Pete today, and you can
7 believe me, I found shade everywhere I could on my
8 half-mile walk in and back.

9 What I have seen is an excessive amount of
10 tree trimming. I watched -- and this is contrary
11 to what we -- or not contrary, but different from
12 what we heard earlier in terms of the tree
13 removal. Those are just the pruners coming in and
14 taking down significant chunks of the trees.
15 There is no sense of what the tree -- I appreciate
16 the hardening that needs to take place to protect
17 us in storms, but this is just excessive. The use
18 of an arborist or somebody who is a little bit
19 more informed in terms of exactly how that will
20 impact the trees' health in the long term should
21 be something that is brought forward.

22 Duke subcontractors have additionally been
23 very active in our neighborhood on the pole
24 replacement. Again, I appreciate the storm
25 hardening action that the higher poles provide;

1 however, why are we increasing pole height when we
2 should be going underground? Our neighborhood has
3 alleys. Access to places to bury these cables is
4 very present, very doable, and I have to question:
5 What's the long-term plan here? Are we paying for
6 poles to go up and then we're going to pay you for
7 them to be buried later?

8 The pole directly behind my home was replaced
9 twice. There was an intermediate-type pole and
10 then a larger pole. And, unfortunately, all I
11 could think was, we're paying for that and how
12 much of a rate increase -- not a rate increase --
13 a profit is going to not only Duke but also the
14 subcontractor that was hired to do this. So,
15 again, I appreciate the value of what we're trying
16 to do with the hardening, but this whole two-step
17 process and the ability for Duke to manage these
18 actions in a reasonable fashion needs to be
19 considered.

20 So the summary here, storm hardening is a
21 good action, but it should be done critically with
22 a view towards the quality of life in our
23 communities, a long-term vision of the correct and
24 best hardening actions, and limiting the expense
25 of rate payers from these collective actions.

1 So in summary, thank you very much for your
2 attention, and I hope you vote the right way when
3 you get there.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
5 testimony. Next up is Brooke Ward.

6 Madam, you're recognized when you're ready.
7 Hold on quick second.

8 MS. WARD: Of course.

9 (Inaudible off-the-record discussion between
10 Chairman La Rosa and Commissioner Fay.)

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Ward, you are a
12 customer of Duke?

13 MS. WARD: I am a customer of Duke. I live
14 five minutes from here at 10954 106th Way, Largo,
15 Florida. I've been a customer of Duke, and I have
16 lived in this county my entire life.

17 COMMISSIONER FAY: We just wanted to make
18 sure, Ms. Ward. You are on the TECO list too.

19 MS. WARD: I am on the TECO list because I'm
20 there tomorrow representing our 5400 Hillsborough
21 customers or members that live in Hillsborough
22 County and Tampa Electric's area.

23 COMMISSIONER FAY: Okay. Thanks.

24 MS. WARD: Thanks for checking. So y'all
25 already heard: Hi, everybody. My name is Brooke

1 Ward. I am here as a Duke customer and also as
2 the senior Florida organizer for Food & Water
3 Watch. We have thousands of members who are Duke
4 customers, but I'm also talking about being a Duke
5 customer myself.

6 So one of the things that concerned me right
7 off the bat when we started tonight was that we're
8 calling this a rate adjustment when the filing
9 that Duke sent to the Public Service Commission
10 was a petition for a rate increase. And I think
11 it's really important, with a lot of the
12 information that's been going around, for us to
13 realize that, at the end of the day, Duke is
14 asking to increase base rates by almost \$200 a
15 year in 2025 and up to \$300 more a year by 2027.

16 These are base rate increases, and these are
17 affecting people like me and a lot of people you
18 have heard here today who have solar on their
19 homes and are very low energy users. When I made
20 the financial decision for my family to put solar
21 on my home, it was because I knew that I would
22 have this lower electricity bill of around 11
23 bucks a month. And within a year, that went up to
24 \$30 a month, which is going from around \$120 a
25 year to \$360 a year, which is a huge difference.

1 That can make the difference between getting a
2 cake for your kid's birthday, being able to have
3 your kids play baseball, being able to actually
4 take maybe a vacation once and a while.

5 That kind of money does impact families, and
6 I'm lucky that I have solar on my home. A lot of
7 people don't have the opportunity to do that. If
8 you're a renter or if you live in multi-family
9 housing, you don't have option to potentially cut
10 down the cost for your energy.

11 Now, I do want to say thank you, though, for
12 having this in-district hearing. I feel this is
13 very important, and if you look at the turnout to
14 an in-person meeting versus what happens on some
15 of the virtual meetings, it shows there's people
16 in the community who care and want to be here, and
17 so we really appreciate that you've brought these
18 back.

19 This comes down to an issue of corporate
20 greed, not corporate need. Duke Energy is asking,
21 as you've heard, for one of the largest returns on
22 equity in the country, and that's money to go into
23 shareholder pockets on the backs of struggling
24 families. And it's not right. If anything -- if
25 anything -- reducing the return on equity would

1 make a huge impact and is something that is not
2 justifiable. Duke Energy has shown returns over
3 the past three years at double the rate of
4 inflation. This is not money they need. It's
5 money that they can then report to show that their
6 stock is something that people should be paying
7 for so that the rich get richer while the poor are
8 struggling to make those payments.

9 So I ask you that you please reject these
10 rate hikes. Think about the families that are
11 struggling and think about all the people who are
12 here today who have taken time to sit here and to
13 share the way the impacts are happening to them.
14 So thank you for your time, and next speaker.

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
16 testimony. Let's go to the next three.

17 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
18 provide sworn testimony are Cindy Scheuermann,
19 David Wiseman, and Robert Hamilton.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Scheuermann, you are
21 recognized when you're ready.

22 MS. SCHEUERMANN: I'll be the only one asking
23 questions instead of making a speech. So my
24 question for you-guys is: You were appointed by
25 the governor; right? That's how you got --

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: We were, but we're
2 probably not going to sit and answer questions.
3 So we cannot --

4 COMMISSIONER FAY: We're here to hear your
5 testimony.

6 MS. SCHEUERMANN: You cannot answer
7 questions?

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No. We're here to hear
9 your testimony.

10 MS. SCHEUERMANN: Well, my testimony was
11 pretty much covered by the other people. I just
12 have a lot of questions. So no go?

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No, not directly to us.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Share your questions
15 so we can hear them --

16 MS. SCHEUERMANN: Okay. Well, my questions
17 are: What makes you-guys the ones to be
18 appropriate for the counsel? So I think I've got
19 it right, the governor appoints you. But what
20 makes you -- what is it in your history, your work
21 history, or your background that qualifies you to
22 make these big decisions that are affecting all of
23 us? And I was wondering how long you served? Are
24 you paid? Are you full-time jobs?

25 Everybody pretty much covered anything I was

1 going to be wanting to ask questions about. I
2 just happen to be one of those people that is
3 making a decision: Do it drop car insurance?
4 Health insurance? Do I turn the thermostat up to
5 85 instead of 81? And Social Security does not
6 keep up with your rate increases. And I was
7 wondering what base -- how did you calculate --
8 you know, did you get proposals from people for
9 all this stuff that's supposedly going to be done
10 for efficiency?

11 I'm just wondering, like the average person
12 that doesn't have a background in finance or
13 anything, as just one of the regular residential
14 customers.

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Well, thank you for your
16 testimony. And I can give you this answer: So we
17 do have Commission staff here that might be able
18 to help direct you to where a lot of those answers
19 are. I can tell you that everything that you
20 asked -- maybe there's a few questions in there
21 that may be a little bit technical, but a lot of
22 that information is available. And I promise it's
23 not hidden anywhere. It's on our website or it's
24 pretty available, you know, through search means
25 through the Internet. But we do have staff here

1 maybe to direct you to our website and some other
2 areas where you can get that information.

3 MS. SCHEUERMANN: Okay. Thanks.

4 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No problem. Thank you.
5 One question here from the Office of Public
6 Counsel.

7 MR. WATROUS: We were going to let you know
8 that the OPC would be happy to help you with those
9 questions as well. And Walt Trierweiler will
10 provide you with our phone number.

11 MS. SCHEUERMANN: Okay. Walt has got a card.

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: I wasn't going to let you
13 go without giving you some direction. I know the
14 intention was for us not to go back and forth, but
15 I think, hopefully, you'll leave satisfied with
16 some direction.

17 MS. SCHEUERMANN: I just had -- I had
18 customer questions.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure. Absolutely. Thank
20 you.

21 Next up is David Wiseman. Mr. Wiseman?

22 (No response.)

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mr. Chair, in the
24 interest of time, could you ask people to just
25 please line up at the podium? That way, we'll

1 know if someone is not here.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: People can just keep
4 coming up in the interest of time.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure. So we're calling up
6 groups of three. So I know that first person
7 doesn't know we're calling them, but the next two
8 know that we are, so just come on up to the
9 microphone as we're getting close.

10 Next up is Robert Hamilton. Robert Hamilton.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And who are the next
12 two?

13 MR. WATROUS: The next two will not be the
14 individuals who signed up online. They are the
15 ones that showed up today. However, we did get
16 about 11 more, so they will also have to take an
17 oath when they get here.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Oh, the additional ones.
19 We will make sure, when we get to that point, to
20 do it. So everyone else after this point, after
21 Mr. Hamilton, has signed up on site. I'm pretty
22 confident they are all going to be here. So I
23 think we will be able to move relatively quick
24 after this group.

25 Go ahead and call the next three. That's

1 fine. And we will let Mr. Hamilton go as soon as
2 you're done.

3 MR. WATROUS: The next three will be David
4 Lough, Denise Hawks, and Mark Klutho.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Hamilton, you're
6 recognized when you're ready.

7 MR. HAMILTON: All right. Thank you very
8 much. I'm Robert Hamilton. I come approaching
9 you from multiple roles. I am a Duke customer
10 here. I am a solar owner, as far as I have solar
11 on my house, but I am also the owner of a solar
12 company that helps customers, many of them in Duke
13 territory, get solar put on their property. And
14 then I'm kind of the de facto spokesman for my
15 extended family here that -- most of them live
16 here in Duke territory.

17 I want to point out that I feel that the
18 minimum bill of \$30 from Duke from is unfair. Not
19 only on its total amount, but also in the manner
20 in which it's rolled out. I actually have a copy
21 of two of my bills here. I know you've probably
22 seen tons of them yourself, but they really
23 illustrate that point, but as a solar owner, I
24 have somewhere either what I have used in the
25 month versus what I have created.

1 I have made enough that I go down to that
2 customer charge of \$12.89 and then Duke tacks on
3 \$17.11, or if I haven't used enough in that --
4 made enough in that month, they get into my earned
5 credits, bring my usage all the way down to zero
6 for the month so that I'm at that 12.89 charge,
7 and then bring it back up to \$30. That's
8 double-dipping. I mean, it's pretty honestly
9 double dipping. But then I have other months --
10 one of them right here -- where I didn't have
11 enough credits, nor did I have enough production
12 to bring me all the way down to zero, so it only
13 tacked on a minimum bill adjustment of \$5.

14 So if you're going to charge me \$30
15 regardless, don't use my extra earned credits to
16 bring me down to zero and then tack on another \$17
17 of usage. I don't feel that's fair to any solar
18 user, any low-income or low-use resident who isn't
19 using enough power to get up to that \$30. I still
20 feel the \$30 is too high in and of itself, but if
21 you're going to charge me that anyway, don't use
22 my extra credits that you've turned around and
23 sold to my neighbor at full price and giving me
24 zero for it and then charge me back up to \$30.

25 So I know that the Public Service

1 Commission's job as listed is committed to making
2 sure that Florida's consumers receive some of
3 their most essential services -- electric, natural
4 gas, telephone, water, wastewater -- in a safe,
5 reasonable, and reliable manner. I don't need to
6 tell you-guys your job, but this is also partially
7 for those in the room. It sounds more reliable
8 and reasonable if my power is from my roof or my
9 neighbors than from, say, the Crystal River coal
10 plants.

11 And it also sounds better for the environment
12 and the economy, as well as Florida's solar
13 industry that supports more than 40,000 jobs.
14 That's 18 billion in economic value, 3 billion in
15 household income, and generates 3 billion in tax
16 revenues for Florida. Not for shareholders
17 somewhere in the world that own Duke's stock, but
18 those local -- (feedback from microphone) -- I
19 don't know; I guess I'm getting a ding
20 [verbatim] -- those in our local Florida tax
21 market.

22 I'm just going to summarize for just a second
23 something from Jordan at LULAC and Florida Rising
24 in our OPC here that Duke already gets more than a
25 10 percent profit based off the most recent

1 numbers I could find, and they want to increase it
2 to that 11-plus percent. Our homeowners are
3 already having a hard enough time with the rate
4 hikes in the past ten full years, and if they
5 don't go solar, like part of my family that I'm
6 talking about that I represent here -- some of
7 them don't live in a manor and a house or aren't
8 of an age where they can afford or have the
9 ability that it makes sense to -- how are they
10 going to survive those rate increases?

11 Duke Energy bills are already the fifth
12 highest in the nation and the highest here in
13 Florida. Do we want to move them to number four
14 in the nation? I mean, yes, that will help my job
15 to push more people into my role for doing solar,
16 but it's not going to help those Americans, those
17 Floridians already hurting.

18 With my multiple roles, I greatly welcome any
19 questions. I thank you for your time as well.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
21 testimony.

22 COMMISSIONER FAY: I wanted to know if -- I
23 saw that you brought two pieces of paper up here
24 and had very specific issues. We can take
25 evidence to examine later on if you're comfortable

1 with doing that.

2 MR. HAMILTON: Okay.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Normally, the clerk --
4 the Commission travels with the clerk's office and
5 their various folks. How do we want to mark it?

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Well, we can -- let's hold
7 onto it, and then if there's any other exhibits,
8 we'll enter them into the record at the end.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All right. For
10 identification, this would be Exhibit 1.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay.

12 MR. HAMILTON: Thank you. I'm happy to
13 provide it.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Actually, it will be
15 Exhibit 2.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you. Thank you
17 for that correction.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Ma'am, do you mind
19 just identifying yourself.

20 MS. HAWKS: My name is Denise Hawks, and I
21 live six miles from here in the county, Seminole.
22 [verbatim].

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

24 MS. HAWKS: I'm going to just go through
25 statistics that I found online that have created

1 issues for me because I wanted to find out what
2 Lynn Good makes, and I found out a lot of
3 information about that: 21 million, 53 million
4 worth of shares. She's paid higher than industry
5 median, and supposedly her compensation is tied to
6 performance; however, I didn't see anything on
7 your website indicating exactly what that
8 performance is. Melissa Seixas is the Duke
9 Florida president. There's nothing online about
10 what her income is or what her performance
11 entitlements are. The earnings per share are up
12 46 percent over the past three years. On December
13 30th, company earnings were noted as 184 billion
14 dollars for the year.

15 Now, I do understand that Duke is over a
16 number of states, so I'm sure how that encompasses
17 Florida. I do understand that you donate to a
18 number of political parties. It varies from state
19 to state, but in Florida, you donate heavily to
20 one specific certain party that always votes for
21 every single rate increase you-people have asked
22 for, and that is over \$250,000 a year to the
23 Republican where you gave \$23,500 to the
24 Democratic party, and that was '19 to '20, and '21
25 to '22, that was 228,000 to Republicans and 67 to

1 the Democrats.

2 My other concerns and issues are, I don't
3 feel like paying for an arena name, I don't feel
4 like, you know, paying for you-guys to donate here
5 and there and everywhere you want because I'm
6 concerned about the people that live near me and
7 myself.

8 In going and finding all of this information,
9 I only went in to find out what was the year that
10 we were assessed money for the Crystal River
11 Nuclear Power Plant to dismantle and decontaminate
12 that, which is almost finished. That was 2.9
13 billion dollars that we were assessed to shut that
14 plant down. I don't know if that went outside of
15 Florida or just to the people in the state of
16 Florida. Let's talk about the Levy plant: 1.4
17 billion dollars in advanced fees to build a
18 nuclear plant that was later canceled. I believe
19 that we were assessed for that also.

20 So the Florida elected officials have granted
21 several rate increases for you-guys in recent
22 years, and here's some of the things that I
23 believe I got off of your website. In 2022, the
24 Florida Public Service Commission approved an
25 agreement that raised customer rates through 2024,

1 which we are in now. We saw bill increases up to
2 4 percent. Now, in 2024 -- and this is where I'm
3 getting confused -- you filed a rate increase with
4 Florida Public Service Commission proposing
5 investments to improve reliability, expand solar
6 generation, and reduce emissions.

7 The request for that was supposed to be an
8 annual increase of approximately 4 percent of the
9 total bill during 2025 to 2027. Now, in 2025, you
10 would like to increase base rates by 596 million
11 dollars over a three-year plan. So that has got
12 me a little confused. On March 7, 2023, the FPSC
13 request of 10 percent and 20 percent, then kept a
14 4 percent increase for 21 months. I don't think
15 we've gone through 21 months yet. That would be
16 almost two years, yet you're looking for another
17 increase. You want a 596-million-dollar increase
18 for 2025, yet you say on the website our bills are
19 going to decrease in 2025. That seems kind of
20 opposite to me.

21 So according to information, you have or want
22 a multi-layer rate plan with an average increase
23 of 4 percent from '25 to '27, yet you expect lower
24 bills in '25. And I cannot understand that logic,
25 so if someone could maybe explain that logic to

1 me, I am going to definitely be in contact with
2 Deb in the back.

3 I do want to say thank you for the phone
4 message that I get when there's going to be an
5 outage or when the power may come back on. I
6 appreciate the emails that you send saying, Oh, by
7 the way, this is what your electric bill is going
8 to be for half of the month. So for half of the
9 month of my next bill, I'm already paying more
10 than I did through the whole of winter. So I am
11 feeling like I'm already seeing rate increases,
12 and I keep my temperature on at 77 during the day
13 and 76 at night. I turn off my pool pump when it
14 looks cloudy because I'm hoping green won't grow
15 in it, and yet I never can seem to bring it down.

16 So, you know, I'm just a little bit confused
17 and stuff like that. And the only other thing I
18 would like to say that I did look up, because I
19 look at all of my customer charges, assessment
20 fees, receipts, taxes, stuff like that, is
21 securitization, if I said that properly. I looked
22 it up. I get charged for that every month. It
23 kinda made me mad.

24 The definition is: Securitization is the
25 conversion of company assets into securities that

1 can be sold to investors for a return. Incentives
2 with big banks are included, but Duke says it can
3 manage bond term negotiations and finances,
4 financial dollars, on its own. Is that what the
5 securitization charge is? Because if you do 6
6 million customers, that's a heck of a lot of
7 money, and that's where your shareholders are
8 getting such a high return increase on their
9 shares and your CEOs, board of directors, and
10 everybody can get so much more money than everyone
11 else in the United States.

12 So other than that, I have nothing to say.
13 Thank you for my emails and phone call.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
15 testimony.

16 I think we may have jumped in front of
17 Mr. David Lough. David Lough?

18 (No response.)

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mark Klutho? Sir, you're
20 recognized when you're ready.

21 MR. KLUTHO: Mark Klutho, Largo. The problem
22 here is that -- you know, we finally referred to
23 your utility as "puke," not Duke. You know, they
24 can't get there from here. You know, there was an
25 edict from the governor -- the fuhrer -- not

1 solar, but fossil fuels. That's what has to
2 happen. And the gentlemen here made some great
3 remarks.

4 What the utility wants to do are these great
5 big solar farms. Not -- key word here --
6 decentralization. Those are solar systems as he
7 is installing on the roofs of houses, on the
8 big-box stores, parking lots, hospitals, schools.
9 Problems with the -- or the problem with those
10 farms' line losses, you're relying on the grid.
11 It's an obscenity, sending that renewable energy
12 into the grid and having those line losses.

13 The solar should be used at the point where
14 it lands, and you then invest in batteries to
15 complement those solar systems. This is the
16 direction of the future. If you don't do that,
17 this is where it's going (gesturing). This is the
18 temperature direction, and here is the headline:
19 Troubling News From the Doomsday Glacier. The big
20 melt is underway.

21 The Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica is going
22 to bring two feet of sea-level rise just from this
23 one glacier, and the scientist say now that we
24 didn't catch this one. Now, what's going to
25 happen with Puke's customers when this one goes?

1 And they're saying that, quite possibly, when it
2 does, it will then release what's behind it, and
3 that means ten feet of sea-level rise.

4 Now, we're in a critical stage here, and, you
5 know, there isn't time to dilly-dally. And the
6 utility asking for money, keep going on the path
7 that they are and -- what is it -- the greatest
8 amount of their effort is going to burning natural
9 gas. It just isn't going to work. I mean, we
10 have been in here now for nearly two hours, and
11 the air-conditioning hasn't stopped running. It's
12 a scary situation. So, you know, the utility, a
13 monopoly, that's taking money from people that are
14 barely surviving needs to be taking that money and
15 spending it in the wisest ways that's not going to
16 be destroying the future.

17 The last time I was before the Public Service
18 Commission was with that nuclear power fowl-up.
19 You know, talk about another waste of money. We
20 need to be wise and start thinking future.

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you, Mr. Klutho, for
22 your comments.

23 We'll go to the next group of three. I'll
24 just kind of give a quick disclaimer: Our court
25 reporter has now been going for almost two hours

1 straight, so after this group of three, I'm going
2 to give them a quick seven-minute break.

3 Let's move on to the next three.

4 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
5 provide sworn testimony are Wade Gibson, Michael
6 Bullock, and Charlene Crawford.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Gibson, you're
8 recognized when you're ready.

9 (No response.)

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wade Gibson and -- who
11 was the second one?

12 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Michael Bullock.

13 (No response.)

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indecipherable.)

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: There you go. Thank you,
16 Ms. Crawford.

17 MR. CRAWFORD: Thank you. I'm glad that
18 you-all are here today because I just found out
19 about this hearing yesterday. I have two
20 properties in Pinellas County: A house which I
21 invested solar power and a condo where my mother
22 lives part time. This minimum fee of \$30 is
23 completely unfair and in no way in the interest of
24 the public, and this is a public utility.

25 As a solar customer, Duke is double-charging

1 by siphoning off my energy credits, as somebody
2 else mentioned here, and still billing me \$30.
3 And I brought two examples with me. In 2022
4 before they started doing that, I earned -- or I
5 had an excess of 1,137 kilowatt hours, which they
6 gave me 6 cents an hour for. You know, they
7 charge other people 13 cents an hour, but, you
8 know, they pay me 6 cents. But then in 2023,
9 because they had been siphoning off my
10 extra [verbatim], I only over-produced 130
11 kilowatt hours at only 2 cents a kilowatt hour.

12 So where the previous customer was proud to
13 pay her \$2.26 a day, I think it was -- I made a
14 note -- in 2023, I only earned \$3.34 in credit
15 from Duke with all of the power that I generated.
16 So I don't think that's very fair on that.

17 Oh, and also, Duke has provided no help in
18 explaining any of this, as I have spent hours on
19 hold trying to get an answer as to why I have
20 these things like the other person mentioned, like
21 what the heck asset securitization charges are.
22 There's nobody available to answer any of those
23 questions or why they get to siphon off my power
24 overages, but yet still charge me \$30. So I have
25 tried several times to get answers on that and

1 have not.

2 But do you know that the Duke Energy
3 Foundation provides more than 30 million dollars
4 annually in philanthropic support to meet the
5 needs of the communities where Duke Energy
6 customers live and work? Well, why don't they
7 just provide that money directly to each and every
8 customer. That seems to be more fair instead of
9 making us file, you know, paperwork and plead for
10 them to prove that we cannot afford these rate
11 hikes and come down here and spend our time and
12 energy to plead to you that we can't afford these
13 things, but yet if we fill out the proper
14 paperwork, they'll give it to us.

15 In 2019, I invested \$10,000 in my solar
16 panels, and in 2020, Goldman Sachs funded Duke
17 Renewables with 109.4 million dollars. Now, I
18 don't know anything about running a public
19 utility, but it seems if Lynn Good, CEO, who
20 earned over 20 million dollars, and Brian Savoy,
21 CFO, who earned 3.4 million respectively, can't
22 figure out how to run a monopoly with private
23 equity investment without gouging their customers,
24 it seems maybe they don't deserve those salaries.
25 Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
2 testimony. We're going to have a quick break here
3 and give our court reporter a few minutes, and
4 then we'll jump right back into action. Thank
5 you.

6 (A brief recess was taken.)

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Just a few quick
8 housekeeping items. I know it's getting a little
9 bit late into the evening. Just kind of a
10 reminder that this is a service hearing, right, so
11 everything that gets said gets recorded. We've
12 got a court reporter that's here. Obviously, it
13 becomes -- I shouldn't say "obviously," but it
14 becomes part of evidence in the case. We get the
15 opportunity to review that.

16 So it is very important that we do hear
17 clearly what's being said. With that said, any
18 clapping or any noise in the background while
19 they're still -- speakers are still speaking, it's
20 very difficult, one, for us to hear, but also even
21 more difficult to transcribe. So I don't mind the
22 clapping. I get the passion. I've got no issues
23 with that, but just make sure that they're
24 completely done speaking so that, you know,
25 nothing gets lost there in transition.

1 So let's go ahead and move onto the next
2 three names. We will get to a point where some
3 folks have come after I swore in the last group,
4 so Mr. Watrous will remind me of that, and then I
5 will ask everyone who is here to speak to stand up
6 and we'll swear you in at that point. We're not
7 there a hundred percent yet, but I'll throw it
8 over to Mr. Watrous to announce the next three
9 names.

10 MR. WATROUS: The next three customers to
11 provide testimony are Sue Lewis, Evelyn Grosch,
12 and Ed Kedzierski.

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sue Lewis, you're
14 recognized when you're ready.

15 MS. LEWIS: Thank you. Testing?

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Yes. Loud and clear.

17 MS. LEWIS: First of all, I want to thank
18 whoever did the photocopying that they double-
19 sided everything. I'm a firm believer in saving
20 our trees, which is more than I can say for Duke
21 Energy and their subcontractors that are cutting
22 them down left and right.

23 They've been leaving -- they've been planting
24 poles -- putting up new poles. They've been
25 cutting trees. I understand hurricane season is

1 coming. Several years ago, I was asked among my
2 street -- proposing that they were going to bury
3 our power cables. That still hasn't happened. I
4 even volunteered to have the transformer on my
5 property for that.

6 Why are we planting poles and paying for that
7 and cutting our trees down when they should be
8 concentrating on and prioritizing burying the
9 cables? They promised that it would be done last
10 year. It wasn't. They promised it's supposed to
11 be done this year, and so far it hasn't. Where's
12 the priorities here? Which is important? Trees,
13 besides producing the oxygen we breathe, provide
14 the shade that we need to prevent climate change.

15 Hear me, Governor DeSantis: I said the bad
16 words: Climate change. I'll say it again:
17 Climate change. What we've got to do today is
18 work on the priorities, knowing what's going to
19 happen in the future. And I don't mean tomorrow.
20 I don't mean a three-year plan that they set up
21 here. I mean 10, 15 years, 30 years. I planted
22 two live oaks on my property 30 years ago. I've
23 been a resident of Florida -- Gulfport -- for over
24 50 years, knowing that those two live oak trees
25 were going to save my power bills. And, yes, my

1 house is now, 99 percent of the day, covered in
2 shade.

3 We've got to think further ahead, more than
4 these three years they have planned, which comes
5 to all these extra charges on here. There's a
6 base rate, and then we have a fuel charge and all
7 these -- there's six other ones listed in the fine
8 print down below. When I was, back 50 years ago,
9 with Progress Energy -- thank you for the name; I
10 couldn't even remember it -- it was a base rate.
11 Everything was within the base rate.

12 By a-la-carting these different charges but
13 not reducing the base rate, they get a higher
14 premium out of that because they're not giving
15 back anything. They're just a-la-carting it. And
16 the base rate doesn't go down for that where it
17 used to be. So they're getting other charges
18 besides these humongous percentages today.

19 We need to be thinking ahead about weaning
20 off the nonrenewable resources: Coal, oil, gas.
21 Why are they charged, these people who have
22 solar -- I can't have solar. I have trees. Okay.
23 Why are solar -- people who have solar being
24 penalized? Why isn't Duke Energy investing in
25 solar more than they are. They're not thinking

1 ahead to what we're going to need in the future.
2 We need to prevent flooding. We need to prevent a
3 lot of things.

4 Now, this increase that they're being asked
5 for -- what is it? Eleven plus over -- over the
6 usual 9percent or some average of 9 percent, I've
7 been hearing around. It seems to me if they're
8 going to want more money against the people of the
9 communities, then that extra 2 percent more that
10 they want, 11 over 9, ought to go in reverse
11 against those upper-class officers of the company
12 that are getting all the perks and the big bucks.
13 They ought to lose that 2 percent if they want
14 that extra 2 percent. It sounds a little weird,
15 doesn't it?

16 I have no pool. I have less than 900 square
17 feet, with a one-car garage. My house is a
18 hundred years old, almost, in 2026. I have Miami
19 windows and geolosy (phonetic) doors. I couldn't
20 afford to put air-conditioning in my house. I'd
21 have to retro the whole house, which is going to
22 cost me more than the house is worth. I do not
23 use air-conditioning in my house.

24 I have learned to live in -- not in a box. I
25 have to admit, I don't get why a lot of people

1 live in boxes nowadays called houses. I live in
2 Florida. My windows are open. People have put
3 fences up all around. It stops the breeze that I
4 used to get. But I live that way because it saves
5 my energy bill. I manage to make it that way.
6 But not everybody can do that. And at my age, I
7 shouldn't have to do that, but I do.

8 So I think Duke Energy ought to think more
9 about the community than about the stockbrokers,
10 the people. I own stock. I own some stock. I
11 like it when the market goes up. But this is not
12 the way to raise it on the communities. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
15 testimony.

16 Next up is Evelyn -- is it "Grosch"? Evelyn?
17 (No response.)

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Next up, then, after that
19 is Ed Kedzierski. Ed? Is Ed in the room?

20 (No response.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Let's go to the
22 next group of three.

23 MR. WATROUS: I believe the next group of
24 three has not sworn an oath yet and neither have
25 the other ones that's left.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. If you're in the
2 room and you plan on speaking or have signed up to
3 speak, do you mind just standing up real quick to
4 take an oath.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We did that already.

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We already did.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: No, no. If you have not
8 already taken an oath and you plan to speak today,
9 just please stand up.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They just said we
11 hadn't, but we did.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We turned in our name,
13 we took an oath, and we haven't been called is
14 what I'm saying.

15 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Correct. So then you're
16 good. So if you have not taken an oath and you
17 have come in after that point, do you mind -- I
18 see two folks standing -- one individual standing.

19 Ma'am, do you affirm that everything you say
20 today is the truth and that you are a customer of
21 Duke?

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Excellent. Thank you.
24 Okay. Let's move on.

25 MR. WATROUS: Based on request, can we please

1 take Glenda Gustafson first?

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sure.

3 MR. WATROUS: And then the next two after
4 that will be Perry E. Ellie and William C. Jonson.

5 MS. GUSTAFSON: Hello. I'm a customer. I
6 recently had solar installed in my house, and I
7 was surprised that we have no choice about whether
8 we're disconnected from the grid or not. So I
9 have to pay the base rate, which is \$30, and then
10 a couple of months ago, my bill says the base rate
11 is going up to \$35. So I called Duke and wanted
12 to know what that's about. Nobody knew. None of
13 the customer service people knew, and I talked to
14 three people.

15 So I was able to talk to a man from the PSC
16 who explained it, explained to me about this
17 meeting and the rates and this little paper I got
18 in my bill, and I was surprised that Duke is
19 charging me, a solar customer, to install solar,
20 but yet they're giving me hardly anything for my
21 solar. So they're selling it for a big increase
22 for using it. So I guess Duke decided that solar
23 is a great idea. They're going to install it and
24 charge, you know, on the backs of some of us solar
25 customers.

1 And then I was curious about the future:
2 When the equipment is paid off, are we going to
3 get rebates for this? Are we going to get
4 anything? Is our bill going down? I mean, I
5 think it's a great idea. I wish we could go to
6 wind also. I think alternative is the way to go,
7 and I appreciate that, you know, Duke is doing
8 that. I'm just not happy about on our backs
9 [verbatim].

10 The other thing is, I like it when the bill
11 comes and it asks for donations for people that
12 can't afford their high energy bills, and I think
13 that's unbelievable now when I hear about how much
14 money Duke is making. So, anyway, that's all I
15 have to say.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Madam, do you mind just
17 stating your name for the court reporter. We went
18 a little bit out of order, so it might throw her
19 off.

20 MS. GUSTAFSON: Glenda Gustafson.

21 THE COURT STENOGRAPHER: Gustafson?

22 MS. GUSTAFSON: G-U-S-T-A-F-S-O-N.

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you.

24 MR. WATROUS: One question, sir.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Gustafson, there's a

1 question.

2 MR. WATROUS: Did you say you were
3 disconnected from the grid?

4 MS. GUSTAFSON: I said you can't disconnect
5 from the grid. We're required to be connected to
6 a grid. We have no choice about it.

7 MR. WATROUS: Okay. That was our concerns.
8 Thanks.

9 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Next up is Perry Ellie.
10 Mr. Ellie, you're recognized when you're ready.

11 MR. ELLIE: Thank you. My name is Perry
12 Ellie. I live a few miles from here. I'm a Duke
13 customer for 40 years or so. Many others have
14 acknowledged concerns about the rates and the base
15 rates. I'm kind of surprised how many people here
16 are speaking about solar. I wanted to add a few
17 comments regarding solar and our usage with this.

18 We've been very blessed in our lives and we
19 were able to install well into a six-figure Tesla
20 solar tile system that has 406 tiles, three
21 powerwalls, and meets all our needs in great
22 excess. Only on occasion do we need to tap into
23 the grid. We pay the \$30. We get our money back
24 from Duke and things like that. But, recently, we
25 wanted to add a fourth powerwall -- we have

1 three -- a fourth one to get us through those rare
2 instances when the sprinkler ran and the pool ran
3 and everything ran, and I didn't want to use the
4 grid at all if I could avoid it.

5 We applied to Pinellas County, and we were
6 denied the ability to add a fourth powerwall,
7 which I think is atrocious. I appealed to the
8 permit department with no success, I went to my
9 local county commissioner without success, and
10 what I have determined, to the best of my
11 understanding, is that we have someone who works
12 in our permitting department here that doesn't
13 believe in Tesla powerwalls.

14 So despite all my best attempts -- and I can
15 be pretty persistent when I want to be -- I had to
16 withdraw my permit and get my refund back from
17 Tesla. And what Tesla has told me directly is
18 they had their top people from their energy
19 division in Las Vegas speak to the people in our
20 county permit department, and they were unable to
21 convince this individual of the validity of having
22 a Tesla powerwall. He feels that they're
23 represented as being a whole-home, basically
24 unlimited backup system. And everyone knows, you
25 know, they have limitations. They only last for

1 so long. That's why I want a fourth one. And he
2 says, Well, you understand that, but many other
3 customers do not. And Tesla told me that we are
4 the only county in the United States of America
5 that they are unable to get a permit at this point
6 in time.

7 When I installed my system three or four
8 years ago, I got a permit for four of them, no
9 problem. Since that time, the new individual came
10 in to play in our county permit department, and
11 they changed the code. The head of the code
12 enforcement department said: I'm not going
13 against my employee. He has, supposedly, the
14 expertise.

15 And I'm no expert -- you know, I know a
16 little bit -- but I don't understand why Pinellas
17 County would be the only county in the United
18 States that says that this equipment is inadequate
19 and they will not give me a permit to install a
20 fourth powerwall system.

21 So I wanted to express that concern. I know
22 it's not really your issue, but I'm looking for
23 any forum to try to get this changed because I'm
24 not the only one. When I was there appealing this
25 to them, they said, Oh, are you the person that

1 lives on Pine Avenue? I went, "No." Are you the
2 person that lives on whatever other road it was?
3 I went, No, I'm the one that lives on 123rd
4 Avenue. And they went, Oh, okay. I didn't see
5 your -- I don't remember your request yet. But
6 they're denying claims to expand our capabilities.

7 I also -- as others have said now, I've heard
8 all kinds of different rates, and it's kind of
9 curious to me, but I believe we're paying roughly
10 seven-and-a-half cents per kilowatt hour we draw
11 from the grid, and that's very rarely. We produce
12 so far this year over 200 percent above our needs
13 on our home. It's a very large, efficient system,
14 yet when we get reimbursed, we get two-and-a-half
15 cents, to my understanding. And, again, I heard
16 other quotes in this room, but roughly one-third
17 of what we pay for. So for every three I
18 generate, I make up the credit for the one that we
19 need to use, and that just doesn't seem very fair
20 or adequate to me.

21 One other final concern that I wanted to
22 share -- and it's a major fear of mine -- is that
23 when I was meeting with this person in the permit
24 department, I went to the county offices and met
25 directly with him. He seemed reasonable, but he's

1 very -- he's dug in, in his positions and things,
2 but he told me -- he says, You're just lucky
3 you're getting this two-and-a-half cents that
4 you're getting right now. And I said, Well, what
5 do you mean? He says, Well, I've been told, in
6 the Carolinas, they have eliminated any rebate
7 back to solar customers, that they believe that
8 having individual solar customers versus their
9 solar farm, to be honest, is kind of a pain in the
10 butt. They don't want to deal with a lot of
11 individual customers and be setting them up and
12 configuring those.

13 So from what I understand, there's a
14 precedent in the Carolinas where no longer are
15 solar customers there being reimbursed [verbatim].
16 I don't know if that's for new ones or if existing
17 customers are grandfathered in, but that's a very
18 significant concern for me. Many of us have made
19 very significant investments in these systems and
20 feeling that we're doing the right thing and
21 trying to, you know, help the environment and make
22 a good economic decision, and if those credits are
23 going to be denied to us in the future, that's a
24 very scary thing. Thank you very much.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your

1 testimony.

2 Next up is William C. Jonson.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He went to the
4 bathroom.

5 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. He stepped out.
6 Okay. Rudy Michalak?

7 MR. MICHALAK: Michalak.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Perfect.

9 MR. MICHALAK: Thank you. Good evening,
10 Counselor -- or Commission Members. I'm sorry.
11 My name is Rudy Michalak, a Duke customer, and I
12 live in Clearwater, Florida.

13 I'm here to actually address a couple of
14 service items that you've already heard about.
15 One is trees. Over the last six months, our city
16 council has been besieged by homeowners who had a
17 number of mature developed trees simply removed or
18 eliminated from their properties. As a result,
19 the city council and city management has worked
20 closely with Duke, and, on June 3rd, had two
21 members of Duke come to the work session with the
22 city council to address this issue.

23 Upon listening to Duke's plan for how this is
24 supposed to be progressed and handled, it seemed
25 that there was a breakdown once that system gets

1 to the actual vendor working in the communities to
2 remove trees. And at that point, it appears that
3 those vendors are simply saying: We have an
4 easement, and simply because your tree technically
5 lies within the easement, we can just remove this
6 tree whether or not it's affecting the lines or
7 not.

8 I bring this up because this may be a cost
9 issue for Duke that can be substantially reduced,
10 and, thereby, reducing their cost if what's
11 happening in Clearwater is happening statewide. I
12 don't know that it is, but I just bring that to
13 your attention.

14 During that same meeting and of equal
15 importance, the representatives of Duke talked
16 about having money set aside for underground
17 facilities of their equipment. And this became an
18 important issue in Clearwater because we are
19 undergoing two roadway redesigns -- each are 2.2
20 miles -- in which we are limited to some of our
21 options simply because of poles that are
22 immediately -- when I say immediately adjacent to
23 the roadway, I'm talking, like, two feet from the
24 roadway and the ability to do something about
25 that.

1 It was indicated to us that they could target
2 money that would help the roadway design, and it
3 seemed to be that this money was coming from the
4 State as opposed to monies maybe necessarily that
5 Duke had to come up with on their own.

6 So, again, I highlight this as an opportunity
7 for Duke, by burying underground lines, to remove
8 the cost of the poles and aboveground wiring and,
9 also, then, not interfere with trees that may be
10 growing, because as we know, the trees are very
11 positive to the environment that we live within.

12 So I just wanted to bring that to your
13 attention from a potential cost-saving economic
14 side that Duke could be working on. Thank you
15 very much.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
17 testimony.

18 Mr. Watrous, do you want to call out the next
19 three.

20 MR. WATROUS: The next three witnesses are
21 Beth Connor, Wendy Schultz, and Catherine Hamelson
22 (phonetic).

23 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Connor, you're
24 recognized when you're ready.

25 MS. CONNOR: Thank you. Good evening. It's

1 almost 8:30, but most of us are still here. My
2 name is Beth Connor. I am from St. Petersburg.
3 And I would like to bring the discussion back to
4 the rate increase request that Duke Energy has
5 filed. I would like to thank this organization
6 for bringing the appeal forward for the citizens
7 of Duke in this area.

8 I first want to say that I agree
9 wholeheartedly with David Harbeitner and Julia
10 Herbst who spoke earlier and all of the people who
11 are talking about their solar credits being taken
12 by Duke and all of the information about solar
13 that's already been said. What I would like on
14 the record is -- and this I took offline today
15 from Macrotrends.net -- that one fact is that Duke
16 Energy's annual gross profit for 2022 was 18.71
17 billion dollars. Duke Energy's annual gross
18 profit for 2023 was 19 billion 381 million
19 dollars. Duke Energy's gross profit for the 12
20 months ending March 31, 2024 was 19.884 billion
21 dollars.

22 I want to say, Duke has some damn nerve to
23 ask for an increase on the backs of people who
24 have had to shoulder their mistakes on nuclear
25 power plants, on their follies all around our

1 counties. Now, I am furious, as you can tell. I
2 have been active in power issues my whole adult
3 life. I've only been able to go to Tallahassee
4 once, but I have been to every one that have been
5 out in the community in my local area.

6 I have heard everyone thank you profusely for
7 coming, and I thank you for coming, but I am so
8 disappointed that the two requests for added
9 public hearings were shot down. Shot down. More
10 people would have been able to come and express to
11 you their extreme uneasiness and absolute -- their
12 feeling of injustice in this, and we could
13 probably all go home before 9:00 o'clock.

14 All it took for -- would be two more meetings
15 [verbatim]. It took me 55 minutes to get here.
16 Pinellas County is really big. You-guys chose --
17 we're only 15 minutes to get out to the beach. I
18 live down by the Skyway Bridge. Someone here is
19 from Tarpon Springs. You-all don't come out very
20 often from Tallahassee. And I understand that is
21 where government is. That's where you-guys focus.
22 But we are out here and we are struggling, and for
23 them to ask for a \$30 increase, base rate, when
24 nobody gets \$30, much less more than that increase
25 from their bosses, from the Social Security

1 Administration.

2 People are working two and three jobs, and
3 they have the nerve to ask for an increase. I am
4 asking you, as reasonable people, as protectors of
5 the consumers, you-guys help us. They're shooting
6 fish in a barrel, and you're the only ones who can
7 protect us. And people are -- you know, I don't
8 want you to think I'm attacking any of you
9 personally. My anger is from the absolute
10 takeover of corporations in this state that are on
11 our backs, and that's not hyperbole.

12 When I -- I mean, I would like to ask a
13 question that I asked of staff: When is the last
14 time the PSC said no? Said no to Duke, no to
15 TECO, no to FPNL. I'll tell you one last time
16 they said no: When the citizens of the Tampa Bay
17 area organized, went to Tallahassee, and beat
18 Florida Power & Light and said, No, we don't want
19 Orimulsion. We didn't want a coke fuel byproduct
20 from Venezuela shipped into Tampa Bay that could
21 have spilled and killed our whole estuary.

22 Now, that's how much people care about the
23 environment in this area and how much we said
24 we're not going to take it, and we went up there
25 and we won. And you know what? We want you to

1 help us win. You-guys have the power to help us
2 win. I mean, you know, people are tired. They're
3 real, really tired of just having things go creep,
4 creep, creep, creep, creep.

5 And it's not just the power company. It's
6 everything. It's cable. You know, there was a
7 grant to allow seniors to have their cable
8 reduced. That was just yanked away. We have
9 people who have things that are just getting
10 yanked away from them, and you have the power to
11 say: No, guys, you know what? Your profits are
12 just fine, and you need to go back and regroup and
13 find out how to stop losing power from your
14 400-acre solar plants during transmission and
15 allow people who have solar on their houses to
16 sell it to their neighbors.

17 This is not anything new. This is not
18 anything new. And I'll tell you, there are people
19 in St. Petersburg who are looking at a contract
20 that's coming up for Duke in the next year and a
21 half. And I'd like to say, I don't think they
22 should have more than a five-year contract. I
23 don't think they should be extended for 30 years.

24 We need to hold this company accountable, and
25 somebody needs to put -- you know, pull that bit

1 back, and I hope it's you-all. Thank you very
2 much.

3 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
4 testimony. Next up is Wendy Schultz.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't think she's
6 here.

7 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Catherine Henderson
8 or -- it's handwritten and it's a little hard to
9 see.

10 MS. HARRELSON: Yeah. it's Harrelson.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Ms. Harrelson?

12 MS. HARRELSON: Thank you. Yeah, I'm a
13 resident of St. Petersburg, a long-time Duke
14 Energy and its predecessors rate payer. This has
15 been interesting. People have had great
16 information, which I was glad to learn about. I
17 wouldn't say I so much have that. I just have
18 some ideas.

19 One is that -- think about the return on
20 equity. Let's just start there. So the request
21 is for 11.15 and then the drop-down response is
22 for 9 and a half, which, wow, sure seems high for
23 a guaranteed rate of return. I would just like to
24 ask: Is anybody getting a rate like that on a
25 guaranteed product? Anybody? Raise your hand. I

1 can tell you right now, no. There's just no way.

2 So that guarantee means something. The fact
3 that we are subjected to a monopoly means
4 something, which is why you're here, the Public
5 Service Commission, which means -- the words
6 "public" and "service" should be part and parcel
7 to this tonight. And this is no reflection on
8 anyone here personally, but having a commission
9 that is appointed by a political system just
10 doesn't make sense to me. We need to find another
11 way. And I'm not saying that's your decision to
12 make, but at some point, appointments need to be
13 done on some sort of independent, public third-
14 party basis. That's all I'm getting at.

15 Okay. What's next. Companies should be able
16 to make a profit, but, again, the guarantee: A
17 big problem. Let me figure out my numbering
18 system here. Okay. Penalizing solar -- I think
19 we've talked about that a lot. I, too, have solar
20 panels, and I didn't even completely understand
21 everything that was going on there, so it was
22 great to hear that, but penalizing solar makes no
23 sense because we are contributing a stable source
24 of power to the grid, which you're just going to
25 need more and more. The heat is on. It's not

1 going to go down.

2 Climate change is real in spite of efforts to
3 the contrary in Tallahassee. Taking it out of the
4 laws does not make it go away. If only. Wouldn't
5 that be lovely. But that predictable profit
6 center is key to a company, especially one that
7 has a guaranteed rate of return.

8 If, you know, you want to upcharge the big,
9 monster homes that are coming in here and tearing
10 down, ripping down every tree in sight and taking
11 out our neighborhoods. You know what? Fine. Set
12 up a graduated payment system on the power use so
13 that -- you know, there is a certain level where
14 you pay X as you go above -- it incentivizes
15 people to reduce their power use.

16 You know, the same rate for every single
17 kilowatt doesn't make sense, and you would do a
18 great service to those who are trying to really
19 minimize their power and actually do care about
20 their bills and about climate change. And you
21 would then push the bulk of that onto those who
22 can, apparently, pay those huge rates because
23 that's why they built a 30,000 square-foot home.

24 I would say that you do need to have
25 climate change as one of your -- Duke needs to

1 have climate changes as one of its primary
2 drivers. Cutting down trees: I'm the cofounder
3 of the St. Petersburg Urban Forestry Committee,
4 and I can tell you that the cutting of trees, the
5 trimming, over-trimming, and the chopping of big
6 shade trees is exactly the opposite of what Duke
7 needs to be doing for its own future. Not only
8 for ours. But reducing the effects of climate
9 change will reduce the amount of fuel that the
10 company has to go out and buy.

11 And in spite of apparent profits from fuel
12 arbitrage -- which, you know, good for them -- we
13 need to find renewable sources, and those need to
14 be secure sources. And the more trees you cut
15 down or the fewer trees that you plant, which you
16 should be actively doing, is actually just going
17 to increase the problem of climate change, which
18 is -- it is really, literally, life and death for
19 Florida. And I know Florida is a big profit
20 source, so that needs to change.

21 Duke really needs to be a leader in climate
22 mitigation, and the Public Service Commission needs
23 to be just that: Public service. Not a shell for
24 the shareholders and the overpaid executives at
25 Duke. Thank you all for being here.

1 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
2 testimony.

3 Mr. Watrous, the next three.

4 MR. WATROUS: Erin McFarley, Jean Nagle, and
5 Daniel Amend.

6 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. McFarley, you are
7 recognized when you're ready.

8 MS. MCFARLEY: Good evening. My name is Erin
9 McFarley. I am a local entrepreneur. I am a part
10 of Florida Rising, and I have been a resident of
11 Florida for 41 years. Not paying bills that long,
12 but have been a resident here my whole life.

13 And so I just wanted to bring some things up
14 to you-all, and we thank you-all for coming out
15 this evening. But as my grandma used to say,
16 common sense is not common, and it appears as if
17 Duke Energy is not using the common sense that God
18 gave them. And, you know, numbers don't lie, but
19 as of April 2024, Duke has 2 million customers in
20 Florida, as we've already heard. They are
21 residential, as well as commercial.

22 Duke has paid over 49 lobbyists, as of March
23 of this year, over 2.2 million dollars. Now, the
24 irony of it is that they're asking for this
25 increase right before election time, and I think

1 that people really need to understand the bigger
2 picture at hand. And I know they also mentioned
3 that -- one of the ladies mentioned about the CEO
4 of Duke. Well, as of December 2023, they made
5 over 21 million dollars. Duke Energy has a total
6 shareholder equity of 50.6 billion dollars total
7 debt of 81.4 billion, which brings its
8 debt-to-equity ratio to 160 percent.

9 The Florida Public Service Commission's
10 office, as the gentleman spoke previously who does
11 solar panels, advise that you-all are here to help
12 us, right, and look out and be a reliable safe
13 source for us as it pertains to electric and
14 natural gas. And as they mentioned previously --
15 and we're going to just go ahead and say it again
16 because we had some new people who came in -- Duke
17 is seeking 2.1 billion dollars over three years.

18 If two plus two is four, for Duke, two plus
19 two is six. It makes no sense. And so we're
20 asking you-all -- and I know another woman asked
21 what actually got you-all these different
22 positions, and you all are free to go and Google
23 yourself to find that out. And I'm pretty sure
24 that you all are very, very aware of what's going
25 on. And it may not affect you directly, but what

1 I am saying to you, whether you were placed in
2 this position or whether you earned the position,
3 you have on your shoulders to actually speak for
4 us, and we want you to not have cognitive
5 dissonance as it pertains to this matter.

6 Living in Florida, we know that our governor
7 and this government is pushed by money; right?
8 And we need you-all to stand in the gap for us and
9 the space and not allow Duke Energy to
10 continuously do this. A gentleman also mentioned
11 that this will be a domino effect. It may not
12 affect you, but it will affect your children.
13 Regardless of this position that is giving you
14 \$135,000 to even be here to help us, but we want
15 you-all to make sure that you stand in the gap for
16 the people.

17 We are actually here because we care. You
18 know, besides the electricity and the things that
19 it's doing to our actual environment, we need
20 you-all to really stand in the gap. We are
21 grateful that you-all came here all the way from
22 Tallahassee, but don't just come down here looking
23 in our faces and hear what we have to say. Make
24 sure that you actually take heed to what we're
25 saying and not just have a hearing, but listening

1 to what we're saying. And we're actually really
2 needing you-all to help us right now because we
3 don't want this to be a domino effect.

4 Duke will continue to do this. They have a
5 plan to 2050, actually, if you go online and you
6 read about it, so it's not just going to stop in
7 2027. It will continue.

8 And so, again, I thank you-all. My name is
9 Erin McFarley representing Florida Rising, and
10 you-all have an amazing evening.

11 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
12 testimony. Next up is Jean Nagle.

13 MS. NAGLE: How do I follow that one? My
14 name is Jean Nagle. I've been living here since
15 2016. I'm originally from California, the other
16 large state that also had an increase. And I turn
17 my back to you right now because I'm speaking to
18 the public. Raise your hand if you agree with
19 this increase. No, you don't.

20 What I'd like to know is, the increase that
21 came in 2017 and the increase that came in 2021
22 and now this increase that's coming, what are you
23 doing with the money? Are you putting it away for
24 a good reason? Like, I don't know, security
25 for -- a good point is electromagnetic pulse. If

1 it goes across the United States, do you have a
2 security plan? Do you have a plan for a hack? Do
3 you have a plan with all this extra money that
4 you're putting in the pockets of the shareholders?

5 I don't know about you, but do you know of
6 any plan in case we have an electromagnetic pulse
7 that goes across the United States and we're
8 stuck? Is that gonna be something that we have to
9 pay for when it comes time for it or when Duke
10 gets held hostage and they have to pay some kind
11 of fee or fine? Are we paying now on some other
12 Duke Electric company somewhere else?

13 The other thing is, have you ever seen a Duke
14 Energy truck? I continue to see Pike. Pike is a
15 North Carolina, I believe, or Georgia electric
16 company? They are subcontractors that come out
17 when we have bad weather. We have had really good
18 weather up until this week --

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Ms. Nagle, can you direct
20 your comments towards us?

21 MS. NAGLE: -- and I don't know about you,
22 but every time I see a holiday, like Memorial
23 Weekend, I see the men putting up poles on a
24 Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Weekend. There
25 was no rush, other than the vacationers are coming

1 into town and they can see Duke is working really
2 hard and getting paid time-and-a-half on a
3 Saturday and Sunday. Why do we need to pay them
4 that? Why do we need to pay Pike subcontractors?

5 I've been here long enough to know that you
6 don't need subcontractors. You have money. Have
7 you taken the money and employed more people with
8 more benefits? That's what I want to know. Where
9 is the money going? Have we increased our
10 employment? No. The bill is still going out to
11 the same -- no, it's not, actually. Our
12 population increased.

13 Our population increased. Pinellas County is
14 the largest county in the state. So you are
15 doubling the bills on all the new people that have
16 moved here. So they're getting more money than
17 they need because of population growth. So
18 continually they keep doubling it.

19 When I found out that the news said that TECO
20 has charged every single Duke customer \$2.14 and
21 we're going to continue to get that charge until
22 2024, the thing that bites me the most is the fact
23 that federal government funding already paid for
24 that. So why are we being charged \$2.14 as it was
25 announced within the last month on the news, that

1 we're paying that that's already been paid by the
2 government? Why are we getting double-billed for
3 that?

4 And today I have learned so much about solar.
5 All of the things that have been mentioned today
6 about solar are all of the problems that
7 California had when they first started it 20 years
8 ago. So it seems like somebody has written a
9 playbook on how to double-bill and how to make
10 more money on customers until they figure it out
11 because half of us don't know that much about
12 solar. But those that are getting double-billed,
13 they do. Those that are not getting the money
14 back that they saved on their energy, they do.

15 So we're making a sacrifice. Where is Duke
16 making a sacrifice? Are they making a sacrifice?
17 Are they putting away money in case we have some
18 kind of hack? Are they putting away money and
19 hiring more people with benefits? No.

20 I'm a single woman. I had to have -- to make
21 a sacrifice in order to pay my bills. My rent
22 increased because there is no rent control. It
23 went from 1,000 to 1,600 on a 900 square foot
24 home, two bedrooms, one bath. So I have two men
25 helping me pay rent and I pay utilities. I'm a

1 house cleaner. I clean for people that live on
2 the beach, on the water, who have money, and they
3 are even complaining about the rate increase.

4 And I want to ask: Why didn't you have this
5 during the day when people are actually wide
6 awake, including yourself, and you're not
7 listening to people after they've had a full day
8 of work, they're late, they're tired, they haven't
9 eaten? And you discontinued two meetings that
10 should have taken place. This is the whole state
11 of Florida. It's the largest state with the
12 largest megalopolis called Duke.

13 Now, I had a wonderful acronym of "sacrifice"
14 spelled out, but basically it just tells you that
15 we're making a sacrifice every time a rate
16 increase comes through. And what do we get for
17 it? Are we getting security? No. We're getting
18 an email that says -- reminds you that your rate
19 increase has gone up, or whatever that lady said.
20 You get a nice phone call during -- you know, when
21 the electricity has gone out.

22 I'm telling you, people are making
23 sacrifices, and they're going to have to look for
24 ways to fight the hurricane season. So my
25 neighbor across the street, who is already

1 restricted on his budget, is 83 years old. So he
2 has a -- he bought a generator a couple of years
3 back, but it doesn't work. So he can't go get it
4 repaired. He has to go buy a new one. So the
5 cheapest solar energy one is \$2,000, and that's
6 only going to save his refrigerator and maybe keep
7 him cool. But he's going to spend that money
8 because he's going to be prepared.

9 You know, as well as I do, hardly anybody
10 prepares like that, but seniors do. And they
11 don't have the money to do that, but they're going
12 to make it happen. That woman doesn't have
13 air-conditioning. She has a fan. Do you know how
14 many people rolled their eyes when they heard
15 that? There is a lot more people like her.
16 There's a lot more people that are not even being
17 reported that don't have the money. They had to
18 move back with their parents. You can roll you
19 eyes all you want, but those 30-year-olds -- now
20 40-year-old-somethings are moving back home. So
21 it's not very funny when they have to move back
22 home and they pay the utilities while their
23 parents pay the rent.

24 Please think about all of those people out
25 there that are not paying their bills right now.

1 And now you're going to do a rate increase?
2 There's no more volunteer groups out there that
3 are going to help them, give them more money, just
4 like there's not enough people out there to give
5 them more food when inflation increases.

6 So we do not have a general government that
7 can step in, in a democratic society. Some
8 countries do, but our country doesn't seem to do
9 that. So Duke is considered a capitalist
10 business, and you can rate increase just because
11 you can. Shame on you. Tell me: When you have
12 an increase in salary for your own employees, you
13 do an assessment; you do a survey; you do a reason
14 why; why are we paying them more. Why are we
15 paying Duke more?

16 The sea continues to rise in Florida, as does
17 the money for shareholders for Duke. I drop the
18 mic.

19 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Next up is Daniel Amend.

20 MR. AMEND: I am coming from a completely
21 different place because I do work for the
22 government, and I know how -- this is not how any
23 of this works. But I will say this: I'm here --
24 I found this -- I found out about this about an
25 hour and a half before it got started, and my

1 concerns are this: Duke -- an 11 percent return
2 on equity, that's a pretty nice guarantee no
3 matter where you're sitting. Now, my 401(k) --
4 and I'm pretty aggressive for an old guy -- is not
5 making 11 percent anymore.

6 I do have neighbors who are elderly. They
7 don't have a whole lot of money. Some of them are
8 disabled. That's going to be tough. Inflation
9 has gone up, but at least the mean tweets have
10 stopped. And that's what's important. You know,
11 don't worry. It'll be okay.

12 I would suggest that you decline this. They
13 just got -- what? -- 5 billion a couple of years
14 ago, and they're coming back? Another thing about
15 service is, Duke did a pretty good job clearing
16 the lines and trees after Irma. I spent a month
17 dealing with Duke, trying to get them to take a
18 wire, some power lines that were in trees that
19 were being pushed towards my parents' house. It
20 took me a month and then a letter, an email, which
21 I CC'd Duke, to Better Call Behnken, who is a
22 local investigative reporter that finally lit the
23 fire underneath their fanny.

24 So my main concern is this: This is a screw
25 job for most of the people here for a myriad of

1 reasons, none of which I think have been mentioned
2 tonight by most of the people. But overall, this
3 is going to screw a lot of people, and it's not
4 the only thing. There's a lot of other things in
5 play that people don't want to talk about that is
6 causing the bulk of their problems, but the
7 electricity bill is not going to help.

8 So I recommend and I pray that you-guys
9 think, discern, and decline. That's my two cents.

10 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
11 testimony. The next person I have physically
12 signed up is Lisa Lanza. Is Lisa Lanza here?
13 Okay. Ms. Lanza, come to the mic.

14 Is there anybody else that I have skipped
15 over that would like to speak after Ms. Lanza? Is
16 there anybody here that would like to speak after
17 her, just so that we can get the timing down here.
18 So one individual. Okay.

19 All right. Ms. Lanza, you're recognized.

20 MS. LANZA: Hello. I just wanted to make a
21 comment about the fact that our -- first off,
22 Rudy, I loved your presentation. I'm from
23 Clearwater also. And we did have Duke Power
24 come -- the date was June 3rd, 2024 -- and you can
25 watch the presentation that Duke Energy gave to

1 the city council. You can go to YouTube and just
2 use the scroll bar so you don't have to listen to
3 everything else. But it was an informative
4 presentation. I'm not going to attempt to go over
5 any of the points right now because if you are
6 interested, watch that meeting. It's, like, ten
7 minutes.

8 Also, one thing I wanted to mention is that I
9 don't know if people realize that every city in
10 Pinellas County, as well as Pinellas County, has a
11 franchise agreement with Duke Energy. The City of
12 Clearwater's franchise agreement expires next
13 year. So I did get a hold of the agreement quite
14 a few years ago, and to date, I haven't really --
15 I've been trying to get a group together to review
16 the franchise agreement. I don't feel qualified
17 enough, plus it would be pretty boring, I think,
18 to do alone. But there may be some ways in that
19 franchise agreement that we can improve things.

20 And we also -- Kathy referred to it. I think
21 it was Kathy or Beth. That's a city council
22 member in St. Pete. It's actually been quoted in
23 the press, saying that St. Pete might want to
24 start looking at a municipal sort of utility,
25 which I understand Tallahassee has. I confirmed

1 it with Mr. Day (phonetic), and I think -- I was
2 told in the back Wickham Park has their own
3 municipal [verbatim]. So I haven't had a chance
4 to research it that much, but I would like to
5 know. I think Jacksonville also has their own.

6 But I did ask the question to a couple of
7 people here: Does the Public Service Commission
8 oversee these private -- excuse me, they're not
9 private -- municipal utilities? So you're
10 shaking -- you're in agreement, no, you have no --
11 so whether that's good or bad, I don't know, but a
12 lot of research has to be done. And every city,
13 people in each city, Pinellas County, in
14 particular, or even the unincorporated areas, they
15 should -- I think they should be looking --
16 getting a hold of their franchise agreement and
17 then finding out when it expires. And, you know,
18 for all we know, maybe Pinellas County could just
19 do a municipal utility for the whole county
20 because we are living on top of each other.

21 It's not -- this would probably be the county
22 to do it, if you're gonna do it anywhere in the
23 state, or maybe Miami, but that's a little bit
24 more challenging, I would think.

25 So those are some of the points I wanted to

1 mention. And thank you for coming. I think it --
2 I'm going to say something about -- I think it's
3 good to have an evening meeting because there are
4 a lot of people working during the day. And those
5 of us who are retired, you know, we could take our
6 nap in the afternoon, and so we could come tonight
7 and be refreshed. So thanks. Thanks again.

8 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your
9 testimony. Let's take a three-minute break and
10 give our court reporter a few seconds here to
11 catch her breath.

12 THE COURT STENOGRAPHER: That's okay.

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Can we power
14 through it?

15 THE COURT STENOGRAPHER: Yes.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Mr. Jerome King?

17 MR. KING: Yes.

18 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Is there anybody else in
19 the room just to double-check?

20 (No response.)

21 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Sir, have you been sworn
22 in?

23 MR. KING: Yes.

24 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Great. You are
25 recognized when you're ready.

1 MR. KING: So my name is Jerome King, and I'm
2 a Duke Energy customer. I live in St. Pete, and I
3 have two accounts with Duke Energy. And my issue
4 is that I'm a parent. I have six children and a
5 fiancée, and I can say that throughout our entire
6 time from when the kids were small to now where we
7 only have two kids living at home with us, our
8 bill is more expensive now than it was before. So
9 for example, this month, my bill is \$430, and some
10 months it can push -- I don't know -- almost \$500.
11 And so with the idea of it being increased even
12 more is scary.

13 I work two jobs and ankle I have a business
14 of my own. And so the ideal [verbatim] is that,
15 if you put a foot forward, you know, things will
16 work itself out. But I don't see that being a
17 reality in a situation where you-guys are going to
18 increase the rate even more.

19 What I'm saying is, I represent a group of
20 people who don't get the opportunity to come to
21 these types of events and express theirselves. All
22 right. I represent a group of people whose bills
23 reflect what my bills are, and so they are
24 struggling. Everyone isn't in the position to
25 gain employment as heavily as I have employment to

1 make sure that my bills are paid. And so the
2 ideal is [verbatim], we already know that a lot of
3 people are being pushed out of their homes.

4 On 34th Street in St. Petersburg, there are
5 hotels that are completely booked, and they are
6 booked because the people who used to live in the
7 homes in St. Pete, they live in those hotels. And
8 so the point I'm making is that it's going to be
9 even more people losing their residence with bills
10 that surpass \$400 a month. That's a lot of money.

11 So I heard a lot of people speaking on bills
12 in here, and I didn't hear anyone say that their
13 bills are that high. And so I don't know how
14 reasonable that is on the scheme, but I think it
15 is not reasonable. And I'm not saying that it's
16 Duke Energy's fault that the bills are that high,
17 but Duke energy has the demographics and the data
18 to say, Yeah, this area -- these guys pay a lot
19 for their bills.

20 We're not being taken into consideration when
21 you increase these bills, and so I want to say
22 that throughout Florida, there are many
23 communities that are dealing with extremely high
24 bills. They don't have solar power. That's not
25 how -- they rent. Okay? The landlords might not

1 be the best landlords in the world, so the houses
2 might not be where they need to be.

3 The point is that this is what they're
4 paying, and when you increase it, they will have
5 to pay that. And people are gonna do whatever
6 they've got to do to try, so it's going to be a
7 cascade of indirect issues that are going to spawn
8 from even more bills.

9 And so I know it's a challenge, but the
10 numbers don't lie. And so if you take a look at
11 the numbers and see how much money -- what's going
12 on? Why aren't there other programs within Duke
13 Energy. Duke Energy has the money. They just are
14 not putting it into the time to realistically and
15 ethically say that they're doing a good enough job
16 when it comes to making sure that the quality
17 energy that they're providing is going to quality
18 establishments.

19 And then the second issue with that is, this
20 crap about payment assistance. And when you go on
21 the website, they're, like, Hey, if you can't pay
22 your bill, we're gonna help you and this is what
23 we're gonna do: You don't got to pay your bill
24 this month. We'll chop it in half, and we'll put
25 half on your next month's bill and then half on

1 the following next bill.

2 I just told you my bill was \$400, so that
3 means if I don't pay it this month, then the next
4 month I've got to pay 600 bucks, and then the
5 month after that I've got pay 600 more bucks.
6 That's not reasonable. How is that assistance?
7 So the point I'm saying is that maybe they need to
8 go back and then do some internal-like
9 restructuring. And maybe you shouldn't take what
10 they're saying serious because the legitimate
11 proof in what they have established right now,
12 especially centered around assistance is crap.

13 So if this is what they're producing on this
14 end, it's no telling what type of misleading stuff
15 they're producing with this topic, and I think
16 it's important that you hold people accountable.
17 And somewhere up the ladder, accountability just
18 goes away. And so the country was built on
19 accountability, checks and balances. We have to
20 have checks and balances. Just because someone
21 tells you they're doing this much, they need to
22 prove it, and you need to hold them accountable,
23 is what I'm saying.

24 Thank you. Have a good day.

25 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Thank you for your

1 testimony. I'm not seeing any other customers
2 that have not spoken, so thank you all for coming
3 out today, and thank you for participating and
4 your willingness to be here. I know it's
5 certainly a long night.

6 I know we have a little bit of business here
7 to clean up with exhibits, so Mr. Trierweiler, I'm
8 just going to name what I have as exhibits. I
9 just want to double-check my notes.

10 Exhibit No. 2, Duke Bill 9100, starting with
11 9100.

12 MR. TRIERWEILER: That's correct.

13 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Exhibit No. 3 would
14 be Duke Account Number starting with 351.

15 MR. TRIERWEILER: That's correct.

16 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. So assign that as
17 Exhibit No. 3. Are there any issues or
18 contentions with that?

19 MR. TRIERWEILER: No.

20 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Then show that as
21 reflected on the record.

22 Okay. Besides that, if there's --
23 Commissioners, do we have any other business or
24 any other comments that you-guys would like to
25 make?

1 THE COMMISSIONERS: (Collectively) No.

2 CHAIRMAN LA ROSA: Okay. Well, again, thank
3 you all for participating. Thank you, Staff, for
4 showing up early and, of course, leaving late to
5 help us get through. I think the customers truly
6 do appreciate that.

7 Seeing no further business, this meeting is
8 adjourned.

9 (The proceedings concluded at 9:18 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA)
COUNTY OF HILLSBOROUGH)

I, MESCHELLE D. MANLEY, CSR, LCR, do hereby
certify that the foregoing proceedings was heard at the
time and place herein stated.

IT IS FURTHER CERTIFIED that I was authorized
to and did stenographically report the foregoing
proceedings; that the same has been transcribed under
my direct supervision; and that this transcript
constitutes a true transcription of my stenographic
notes of said proceedings.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative,
employee, attorney, or counsel of any of the parties,
nor am I a relative or employee of any of the parties'
attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I
financially interested in the action.

Dated this 2nd day of July 2024.



MESCHELLE D. MANLEY, CSR, LCR
Notary Public, State of Florida
My Commission No. HH 78972
Expires: 01/10/2025

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