

✓ Ken Ark
sent 3/14/06

✓ To AV.

✓ To Comm. H

HWI-W-06-02

March 12, 2006

Re: Another Rate Increase for United Water

Dear Sir or Madam:

RECEIVED
MARCH 14 AM 8:04
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Additional rate increases should be coupled with two important steps to better serve the people and to deal with our water situation.

One, the time has come to at least allow monthly billing for United Water. I understand the idea that bimonthly billing forces water conservation. However, the reality for most people today has far surpassed this outmoded thinking. Most people are in the same boat my wife and I are in: both working full-time but seeing our income falling farther behind the cost of living. In our case, we have three college degrees between us and good jobs, although obviously not in lucrative fields. Our real income has significantly declined in recent times. Most people I know say the same thing.

Idaho is generally a low-wage state, and wages generally do not keep pace with inflation. Significant increases in bills for water, natural gas, transportation, property taxes, health care and so on are swamping us. Despite my best efforts to conserve on yard irrigation - having gone to great lengths and expense in this regard - getting socked with several large bimonthly bills each year becomes increasingly grievous.

Two, the PUC should require a very modest portion of United Water's profits to be dedicated to a revolving water conservation fund. The fund would be used to help municipal water customers greatly reduce water consumption for yard irrigation -- implementing xeriscaping, drip irrigation etc. to at least some degree. Funding could be a combination of grant or low interest loans and could also be means-tested to help those less able to help themselves in this regard. This could include some component regarding large parcels such as parks, cemeteries, school grounds etc.

It is fine for United Water to offer a few water conservation classes here and there, but we need a serious program to help people greatly reduce water consumption. It is not unreasonable to make this program part of the cost of doing business. Additionally, this approach is consistent with the definition of public water being publicly owned in our state. Why not use part of our money to help conserve our resource?

Level-pay billing probably goes too far, making it too easy to absorb these increasing costs. But at least you can let us have monthly bills as so many of us struggle with a stagnant if not falling standard of living. Billing must match the reality of today's world, not some other world in which fewer and fewer of us can afford to live.

A personal note in closing - my wife and I spent thousands of dollars to completely renovate our yard these last few years (thanks to cashing in some home equity via low interest rates). We have no traditional yard grass at all. Trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses and flowering perennials are served by drip irrigation. Non-irrigated pathways, landscaping rock and bark cover large areas. It's semi-xeriscaped. We still get at least two large bimonthly water bills despite our best efforts. We will never recover the cost of doing this - but did it anyway. Many people do not have the luxury that we had to even consider this without a big helping hand. Let's help each other out in this important regard.

Thank you for considering my thoughts.

Steve Lester
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