

**Dear Editor:**

"We'll go bankrupt by February."  
"We're sending lay off letters to employees now." "We'll cut off the supply of electricity and natural gas." "We'll discontinue community donations."

If you're not hot under the collar at utility company scare tactics, you should be. Big profits hire big marketing firms to scare us. I'm sure you've noticed scare tactics are in vogue just now. I, too, want to scare you: If AmerenIP gets its way, your electric rate will jump 40 percent in January.

But did you know your electric rate is *already* higher than *all* surrounding states? You'd have to go to the East and West coasts to find higher rates. AmerenIP charges us 7.5¢ per kilowatt hour. Missouri pays 6.1¢ and Minnesota, Iowa, Arkansas and Tennessee are also in the 6¢ range, while Indiana and Kentucky are 5¢.

Now AmerenIP says it's passing on its higher costs. From whom will AmerenIP purchase the electric power it resells to us? Why, of course, from Ameren Corp.,

its parent company. (Now you can *really* be scared!) Ameren says not to worry - the average bill will go up only \$1 per day.

Are you average? What's your electric bill now? If you pay \$150 a month, for example, a 40 percent increase will cost you \$2.33 more each day or \$850 more per year.

The state legislature instituted a rate freeze in 1997. Yet during the freeze, Ameren made record profits, soaring last year to \$628 million. It's among the most profitable utilities in the country.

Other places have citizens' co-ops. The little town of Naperville, Ill. buys power for its citizens and has figured out how to buy electricity for less than Ameren. When Ameren goes bankrupt, I think I'll ask Naperville to lend a hand. Apparently they know something Ameren doesn't.

You can call your state legislators on AARP's hotline, (800) 719-3020, and tell them you support SB 607, continuing the utility rate freeze for three more years while a real energy program is developed. Also, call Illinois Senate

President Emil Jones, (773)995-7748, or e-mail: jones@senatedem.state.il.us.

I told my legislators: (1) nothing's changed since you instituted the freeze in 1997, there still is no competition and AmerenIP buying power from daddy is not competition; (2) Ameren is making great profits (up 18 percent last year); (3) taking pity on those who can't pay their bills by deferring payment and then charging 6.5 percent interest is a sham! (4) extend the rate freeze three years while cooler heads prevail.

If your legislator hasn't decided, or is against the rate freeze, then ask the question (5) "Which utility companies give you campaign contributions and how much?"

For the latest on this issue you can go to the Citizens Utility Board Web site: [www.citizensutilityboard.org](http://www.citizensutilityboard.org).

**Richard Ellerbrake**  
**Spokesperson**  
**Stop 158: Citizens for Smart Growth**

## Scary words: No choice

"We'll go bankrupt." "We'll lay off employees." "We'll cut off the supply of electricity and natural gas." "We'll discontinue community donations." So says scary Big Electric.

If AmerenIP gets its way, electric bills will jump 26 percent to 50 percent in January. AmerenIP charges an average 75 cents per kilowatt hour. AmerenIP says not to worry. The average bill will increase only \$1 per day, and people who can't pay now can pay later. With interest.

Ameren is among the country's most profitable utilities. Profits soared last year 18 percent to \$628 million.

If Ameren goes bankrupt, I think I'll ask Naperville, Ill., to lend a hand. Naperville knows something Ameren doesn't. Naperville's municipal utility negotiated a lower rate for its residents than Ameren did for its 1.2 million customers.

Residents should call their legislators to tell them they're tired of a monopoly and that the utility rate freeze should continue while a real energy program is developed, with a real open market.

Richard P. Ellerbrake | St. Clair County

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