

Coalition: support growing to cap fixed electricity charge at \$10

BY DAVID KRECHEVSKY REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

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A coalition of environmental, religious and union groups said Monday that support is growing for its proposed legislation to cap the fixed residential charge on electric bills at \$10 per month.

Last week, the state Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, or PURA, issued its final decision approving a more than \$134 million increase in revenue for Connecticut Light & Power Co. That decision included allowing the fixed residential fee to increase to \$19.25 from \$16, a 20 percent jump.

CL&P, the state's largest utility with 1.2 million customers, originally had sought to increase the fee to \$25.50 per month, saying that would bring the fee closer to its cost.

Monday, the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs held a news conference with legislators in the Legislative Office Building in Hartford to announce an initiative to cap the charge.



John Humphries, at podium, organizer for the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, talks about a proposal to cap the fixed residential charge while standing next to a cutout of The Grinch with Connecticut Light & Power's logo attached during a news conference at the Legislative Office Building on Monday in Hartford.

John Humphries, an organizer with the roundtable, stood beside a large cutout of The Grinch with CL&P's logo attached to open the news conference.

"Unfortunately, we know the CL&P Grinch is not going to find his heart this Christmas," he said. "Instead, he will continue taking more money every month from each one of us before any of us ever turns on a light bulb."

Humphries said the roundtable has collected endorsements for its proposal to cap the fixed charge from "nearly 600 people affiliated with dozens of organizations and living in 150 towns across the state."

He was joined in the news conference by legislators who also endorse the cap — Rep. Lonnie

Reed, D-Branford and co-chairwoman of the legislature's Energy and Technology Committee, along with Rep. Philip Miller, D-Ivoryton, and Rep. Matthew Lesser, D-Middletown.

Reed came out last week in support of imposing a cap and then allowing the fee to increase at the rate of inflation beginning in 2020. Monday, she called the fixed charge a "punishment fee" for ratepayers.

"Our public policy is a big success," Reed said. "People are excited about conservation and renewables. ... Record numbers of business and residential consumers are installing these systems."

However, she continued, instead of "embracing the future and figuring out how to play an important role in moving us all forward, CL&P has chosen to pursue a massive hike in its fixed rate in order to compensate for a reduced demand in electricity consumption. CL&P is penalizing us all for doing the right thing."

Mitch Gross, spokesman for CL&P, provided a statement via email saying a cap would just shift the cost elsewhere in customers' bills.

"There are significant expenses associated with running a large and complex electric system and it is crucial we are able to recover these costs so we can continue making targeted investments in Connecticut's electric infrastructure," the statement said. "... Capping the fixed rate would negatively affect our ability to do the upgrade work at the high level that is needed, and it would result in a rise in variable rates, which are linked directly to how much power is used."

Formed in June 2012, the roundtable is a partnership between the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, made up of religious and environmental groups, and the Connecticut AFL-CIO. The coalition advocates for public policies that address concerns about climate change while preserving and creating jobs in the state.

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