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Concerned Coastal Residents Speak Out Against Power Rate Hikes

SAVANNAH, GA – Over one hundred local residents attended a town meeting Thursday night, hosted by Georgia Watch and the Sierra Club, to speak out against Georgia Power's proposed power rate hike and solar tax. Georgia Power, the state's largest utility, asked state regulators to approve a \$478 million rate hike and solar tax to go into effect on Jan. 1, 2014. Meeting attendees learned about the likely impacts of Georgia Power's rate hike proposal and shared their concerns with members of the Georgia's Public Service Commission in attendance. The Public Service Commission will vote to approve or deny the rate hike in December.

"Electricity bills in Georgia have risen steadily year after year," said Elena Parent, executive director of the consumer advocacy organization Georgia Watch. "People are still trying to recover from the tough economic times we've had in this state and another rate increase will make it even harder."

Tonight's town meeting is one of a series of meetings across the state, all organized by Georgia Watch and the Sierra Club. If approved, the Georgia Power rate increase would add nearly \$8 a month to the average residential bill. Georgia Power's plans to charge customers starting in 2014 for equipment upgrades to obsolete coal-fired power plants in 2016, but as market trends continue to shift away from coal plants across the country, some meeting attendees questioned why Georgia Power would want to charge customers in advance for an investment that may not make sense two years from now.

"Georgia Power's proposal is unfair, plain and simple," said Karen Grainey with the Coastal Group of the Georgia Sierra Club. "In two years, coal will be even more expensive, so spending hundreds of millions of dollars now to upgrade obsolete plants in the future is simply a waste of money. It's like the hamburger – Georgia Power will gladly charge us today for something that may or may not happen tomorrow."

The power company also wants the commission to increase Georgia Power's guaranteed profit to 11.5 percent. In addition, Georgia Power wants to charge an additional fee to customers who install solar panels to power their homes, farms or small businesses if they require any electricity from the power company. Attendees were shocked to learn about Georgia Power's proposal to tax property owners installing solar power on their property.

"People should be able to go solar to reduce their power bill, help clean up the air, and support a new American industry," said Pooler resident Claudia Collier. "Georgia Power wants to step in and tax something that brings a lot of benefits to the homeowner and the community. It's not fair and the Public Service Commission should vote against this tax."

The Public Service Commission is also sponsoring two hearings to take comments from the public at 9:00 am November 5 and 6 in Room 110 at 244 Washington Street, S.W., Atlanta. Individuals who wish to weigh in, but are unable to attend a meeting are invited to visit <http://crs.psc.state.ga.us/Consumer/Opinion/utilityIndustry.aspx> to submit an online comment.

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About Georgia Watch

Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a non-profit, nonpartisan 501-(c)(3) organization working through advocacy and education to give consumers a fair shake in the areas of consumer energy, healthcare, access to civil justice and personal finance. www.georgiawatch.org

About the Sierra Club

Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. Inspired by nature, we are 2.1 million of your friends and neighbors, working together to protect our communities and the planet. Read more at <http://www.sierraclub.org>.