USESC EXHIBIT 5.6
(PART 3)

WordPress database error: [Got error 127 from storage engine]
UPDATE wp_bas_pages SET page_label = 'Weekly update of alternative gas suppliers' prices' WHERE page_string = '/blog/index.php/2007/10/26/weekly-update-of-alternative-gas-suppliers%e2%80%99-prices/';

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« VoIP provider Vonage settles with Verizon
Cool picture! »

Weekly update of alternative gas suppliers' prices

As always, CUB has updated this week's offers from new gas companies in its Customer Select and Choices for You publications. The majority of these offers are much higher than Nicor's 68 cents per therm, Peoples Gas' 68.11 cents per therm and North Shore Gas' 72.65 cents per therm. The highest offer out there now is U.S. Energy Savings Corp. at $1.09 per therm for a 4 to 5-year fixed rate. However, when you look over the offers, be sure to read our Consumer Alert and check out the Gas Market Monitor.

This entry was posted on Friday, October 26th, 2007 at 4:59 pm and is filed under Uncategorized. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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UPDATE wp_bas_pages SET page_label = 'Alternatives to the "Green Energy Option"' WHERE page_string = '/blog/index.php/2007/10/19/alternatives-to-the-%e2%80%9cgreen-energy-option%e2%80%9d/';

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« Fuel-efficient cars for 2008
Another great phone-bill clinic »

Alternatives to the "Green Energy Option"

A few days ago we posted an entry about U.S. Energy's "Green Energy Option" program that charges customers a premium on their natural gas bills to "offset their household's natural gas related greenhouse gas emissions with sponsored carbon reductions."

There may be cheaper ways to offset your greenhouse gas emissions, than with U.S. Energy. That company charges $20 a month to offset all of the greenhouse gasses related to the average household's natural gas use–in addition to its high $1.09 per therm rate (locked in for 4-5 years!).

To learn more about carbon offsetting, including its pros and cons, check out this article. To find reputable offsetters, see the profiles of "top performing retail offset providers" on page 15-20 of A Consumer's Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers. To find out how offsetting works and compare offset prices, check the websites of the firms listed in the Consumer's Guide listed above. For your convenience, here are direct links:

AgCert / Driving Green (Ireland)

atmosfair (Germany)

Carbon Neutral Co. (UK)

Climate Care (UK)

Climate Trust (US)

co2balance (UK)

NativeEnergy (US)

Sustainable Travel / My Climate (US)

Anne McKibbin, CUB senior policy analyst

This entry was posted on Friday, October 19th, 2007 at 5:06 pm and is filed under Uncategorized. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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CUBlog

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« More good press for CUB's Cellphone Saver
AT&T refuses to honor promotional pricing »

CUB guides give you facts on alternative gas suppliers

Natural gas prices are going through the roof and northern Illinois consumers might be tempted to jump to an unregulated natural gas supplier. You can get the facts on the latest prices in our special guides for Nicor customers and Peoples/North Shore Gas customers. Even though the utilities' prices are falling in northern Illinois, a lot of unregulated companies are offering better prices this month. Until now, most of the deals had been losing customers money. Just remember that the utility prices in northern Illinois are falling. So unregulated deals that seemed good the last few months may turn bad. A good example is U.S. Energy's offer to lock in customers at $1.09 per therm. When the company began to offer it months ago, the price was much higher than Nicor's rate. Of course, that rate beat the utility offer the last few months, as prices approached $1.50 a therm.

Now, that offer is a money-loser again in Nicor's territory where the regulated utility is charging $1.08 per therm. So these unregulated offers have been saving money in the summer, when usage is down and gas bills aren't as high.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, August 19th, 2008 at 4:11 am and is filed under Nicor, Peoples Gas, North Shore Gas, natural gas, All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies, Natural Gas, All categories, Peoples Energy. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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« Ameren Angst
CUB plans Alton, Lincolnwood, Palatine phone-bill clinics »

U.S. Energy in the news

The Better Business Bureau is urging that consumers use caution when dealing with U.S. Energy, an unregulated natural gas company operating in northern Indiana and Illinois. Call CUB if you want the facts about the company and its deals, 1-800-669-5556.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, June 10th, 2008 at 7:41 am and is filed under All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies, U.S. Energy, All categories. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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`UPDATE wp_bas_pages SET page_label = 'Kudos for CUB' WHERE page_string = '/blog/index.php/2008/03/10/kudos-for-cub-2/';`

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« Solar cells on soda bottles?
Sprint says pay up to victim of ID thieves »

Kudos for CUB

A reader of Stephanie Zimmerman's "The Fixer" column in the Chicago Sun-Times gave a nice plug to CUB. And the column has a great headline: "CUB gets phone fixed fast."

Dear Fixer: Just thought you might want to include in your column a note to readers about a wonderful resource that is often overlooked. I wish now that I had thought of it in June when my phone company accidentally deactivated the touch-tone service on my landline phones when they activated my new DSL high-speed Internet service.

For a full month, I spent hours upon hours on the phone with so-called "supervisors" who were completely ineffectual in getting my touch-tone service restored. I gave up until early October, when I decided to contact CUB, the Citizens Utility Board, at Citizensutilityboard.org as a last resort.

A real person answered the CUB 1-800 number and I finally got the help I needed. CUB contacted the phone company on my behalf, and within 48 hours someone from the executive appeals department telephoned me. My touch-tone service was restored a few days later. Readers may not realize that CUB offers help for more than just rate issues.

Genie Lerch-Davis, Lake Zurich

Dear Genie: The Fixer has endorsed CUB's services before and will happily do it again. CUB was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1983 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization to represent the interests of residential utility customers across the state.

Just last week, CUB and others filed a complaint with the Illinois Commerce Commission against U.S. Energy Savings Corp., a company that's been in this column before because of complaints about its sales practices and hefty termination fees.

In addition to the Web site, consumers can reach CUB at (312) 263-4282 or (800) 669-5556.

This entry was posted on Monday, March 10th, 2008 at 4:31 am and is filed under telephone, All Categories, Telephone, Consumer Tips, All categories. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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« Hell hath no fury….
Nicor needs an increase like I need a hole in my head! »

More on U.S. Energy

Here are stories from WJBC in Bloomington and from The Times of northwest Indiana. The last one begins with a particularly good story from Lynda DeLaforgue, a consumer advocate who joined with CUB in filing the deceptive-marketing complaint. Her father signed up for a $1.30 per therm offer and ended up overpaying by about $2,000 before he died this year.

This entry was posted on Thursday, March 6th, 2008 at 4:55 am and is filed under natural gas, All Categories, U.S. Energy, Natural Gas, All categories. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

One Response to "More on U.S. Energy"

1. *dennisandee* Says:
   March 8th, 2008 at 4:12 pm e

   I am one of the many duped by U.S. Energy Savings Corp. Their spokesman/salesman/pitchman came through our neighborhood last June touting the the savings of a FIXED price of $1.14 per therm. At the time, it sounded like a good idea. But this winters gas bills have proven otherwise. $260.51 for February. $222.26 for January. $285.82 for December. Where is the savings. One of my neighbors did not switch from North Shore and they are only paying 82.7 cents per therm. All I can say is "buyer be ware." Thank heaven for CUB.

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« Zinged by Zekman!
On "clean coal technology" »

More on U.S. Energy

Here's the coverage on CUB's deceptive marketing complaint against U.S. Energy from CBS, Fox, NBC, Crain's Chicago Business., the Chicago Tribune, and the Chicago Sun-Times..

This entry was posted on Tuesday, March 4th, 2008 at 4:39 am and is filed under All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies, U.S. Energy, All categories. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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« Harry R. Querry for President!
More on U.S. Energy »

Zinged by Zekman!

Investigative reporter Pam Zekman reports on CUB's complaint against U.S. Energy.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, March 4th, 2008 at 4:04 am and is filed under All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies, U.S. Energy, All categories. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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« Now YOU can comment on rate-hike cases
'I feel like I'm a victim of corporate greed' »

Peace of mind?

U.S. Energy responds to critics: "USESC provides price stability and, foremost, peace of mind…We do not claim in our written materials and, likewise, we do not permit our sales representatives to say, that there will be savings when describing our product." OK, but the company's own name is U.S. Energy *Savings*.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 13th, 2008 at 5:02 pm and is filed under natural gas, All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies, U.S. Energy. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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UPDATE wp_bas_pages SET page_label = 'U.S. Energy update: '...It offends your moral sensibilities'' WHERE page_string = '/blog/index.php/2008/02/12/us-energy-update-it-offends-your-moral-sensibilities/';

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« U.S. Energy stories
And on the phone front: CUB to take money-saving tips to Elgin »

U.S. Energy update: '...It offends your moral sensibilities'

So says Attorney General Lisa Madigan in this Chicago Tribune article about a Catholic convent that entered into a U.S. Energy contract only to see their rates shoot up by almost 50 percent. When the nuns tried to get out of the offer, they faced an exit fee of nearly $1,200. The attorney general has filed suit against U.S. Energy, asking it to stop deceptive practices, pay $50,000 for each incident of fraud, pay another $10,000 fine for any violation involving a buyer over 65, rescind any contracts signed on a fraudulent basis and repay overcharged customers. The convent case recently came to CUB's doorstep. The complaint sent to us claimed a salesman representing U.S. Energy Savings subjected a nun to high-pressure tactics and promised that "savings on the cost of gas were 100 percent certain."

And U.S. Energy's making headlines in the Hoosier state, too. This is a great example of why everyone should be reading their gas bills carefully. The man in the story paid his gas bills for a year and a half before realizing that he was doing business with U.S. Energy–at double the utility rates.

Jim Chilsen, CUB communications director

This entry was posted on Tuesday, February 12th, 2008 at 5:56 am and is filed under Nicor, Peoples Gas, North Shore Gas, natural gas, All Categories, Unregulated Gas Companies. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site. Edit this entry.

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CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

208 S. LaSalle St. Suite 1760 • Chicago, IL 60604

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 3, 2008

CONTACT: Jim Chilsen
312-263-4282 (o)
312-513-1784 (c)

CONSUMER COALITION SAYS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, FILES ICC COMPLAINT CHARGING U.S. ENERGY WITH DECEPTIVE MARKETING

Door-to-door peddlers for U.S. Energy Savings Corp. falsely promised savings, circulated bogus petitions "to lower heating bills," and claimed to work for regulated utilities and the government to lure people into some of the worst natural gas "deals" in Illinois history, a consumer coalition charged in a deceptive-marketing complaint Monday.

The complaint was filed by the Citizens Utility Board (CUB), AARP Illinois, and Citizen Action/Illinois. It asks the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) to ban U.S. Energy's deceptive tactics, wipe out illegally high "exit" fees, levy fines of up to $10,000 for each violation of Illinois' alternative gas supplier law, and consider revoking its certification to operate in Illinois.

"Enough is enough," said CUB Executive Director David Kolata, whose organization has received about 2,500 inquiries/complaints about U.S. Energy since September 2003. "We want the ICC to do everything in its power to stop U.S. Energy's shady practices. Illinois should protect consumers from being scammed out of hundreds of dollars at their own doorstep."

This is CUB's second complaint against the Canadian company in as many years. After a 2006 settlement that won relief for many customers, U.S. Energy promised to improve. However, CUB has gotten a steady stream of complaints—more than 1,500 since January of 2007 as the company pushed high-priced plans for the winter-heating season.

U.S. Energy, which has an "unsatisfactory" rating from the Better Business Bureau of Chicago and Northern Illinois, currently locks its customers into a price of about $1.11 per therm to nearly $1.18 per therm for four or five years. Prices have only reached those levels for a few months in the winter of 2005-'06, the most expensive heating season in Illinois history. CUB's Gas Market Monitor, an online tracking tool, shows that about 99 percent of U.S. Energy's plans have lost or are losing customers money—on average about $750.

"Targeting older people and taking advantage of consumers with bait and switch tactics that result in higher gas bills and misrepresenting services are predatory practices that need to be

-more-

stopped," said Bob Gallo, state director for AARP Illinois. "Finding ways to get people to pay more for the utilities they already struggle to afford isn't just bad business, it's appalling and we urge the ICC to stand up for consumers and put an end to it."

"I didn't think it were possible, but U.S. Energy's behavior has actually gotten worse," added Lynda DeLaforgue, co-director of Citizen Action/Illinois. "U.S. Energy has misled consumers—many of them seniors and people who don't speak English—to sell some of the worst gas deals in Illinois history."

The complaint alleges that U.S. Energy's sales tactics violate a number of Illinois laws, including the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act. Customers have alleged:

*U.S. Energy sales representatives guaranteed savings. One customer wrote he was "tricked" into signing a contract by a salesman who said it was a petition for "lower gas prices."

*A U.S. Energy salesman claimed the company was a government entity working with Peoples Gas to "lower long-term gas prices." In another case, a representative pitched a "government program to protect people from rising gas prices." U.S. Energy employees also were seen wearing badges that prominently displayed "Illinois Commerce Commission" or "ICC."

* U.S. Energy has threatened to charge high "exit" fees to get out of the company's contracts: $1,800, $740, $400, $890—more than $1,500 for one couple who had signed up for U.S. Energy thinking they were enrolling in the Peoples Gas "budget plan." These "unreasonably high" fees—sometimes thousands of dollars—are an "illegal penalty for cancellation of service under Illinois law," the complaint alleges.

A recent CBS 2 undercover probe backs up the coalition's complaint, revealing that sales trainees were encouraged to promise savings and offer protection from any of the upcoming price increases. This is misleading because all consumers must pay the utility—Nicor Gas, North Shore Gas, or Peoples Gas—to deliver gas to their homes. Those "delivery" prices could be subject to rate hikes that customers can't escape.

CBS also reported that the trainees were advised to compare a "therm" (the natural gas it takes to run a typical home furnace for an hour) to a gallon of gasoline—a completely different comodity. One trainer bragged he could sell to people who don't "speak a lick of English." The company has admitted these tactics were not authorized.

CUB is a nonprofit utility watchdog group created by the Illinois legislature to work for lower electric, gas and telephone bills. Since 1984, CUB has saved consumers more than $10 billion by blocking rate hikes and securing refunds. To learn more, call 1-800-669-5556 or visit www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

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CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

208 S. LaSalle St. Suite 1760 • Chicago, IL 60604

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 19, 2007

CONTACT: Pat Clark
312-263-4282

CUB ISSUES CONSUMER ALERT: BEWARE OF NEW GAS COMPANIES, MOST ARE MONEY LOSERS FOR CONSUMERS

BLOOMINGTON—Hundreds of thousands of northern Illinois consumers have been slammed with soaring natural gas bills after switching services from traditional utilities to a new breed of unregulated gas supplier, according to a consumer alert issued Wednesday by the Citizens Utility Board (CUB).

In fact, CUB's newly revamped Gas Market Monitor, a free online tool that tracks monthly price offers by unregulated suppliers, shows that 93 percent of the plans marketed by these companies to date have cost consumers money when compared with prices of the regulated gas companies, Peoples Gas, Nicor and North Shore. And the average loss is huge: $270.

The companies' marketing materials prey on fears of skyrocketing natural gas costs and often give misleading information about gas prices. CUB also has received complaints that door-to-door sales people posed as representatives from or claimed their service was endorsed by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), Peoples Gas, Nicor, and even CUB.

To protect themselves from unwanted gas-company marketing, CUB is urging consumers to sign up for a little-known Do Not Market list managed by the gas utilities. Gas suppliers are required to obtain a copy of the list monthly and purge the names on it from their marketing campaigns.

"Competition in the natural gas market was sold to consumers as a way to lower their heating bills," CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. "But exactly the opposite is happening. Hundreds of thousands of consumers are paying substantially more than they should on their gas bills, often because unregulated suppliers misled them or didn't give them all the facts."

CUB EX. 2.4/2.5 00000153

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According to state and federal data, roughly 300,000 Illinois consumers are now served by unregulated, alternative suppliers. Nine such companies are marketing to consumers in northern Illinois and those marketing efforts kick into high gear in September, right before the winter heating season begins.

Most of the suppliers offer fixed-rate plans, which lock in prices for a period of one to five years. Some also offer a variable rate tied to an index that changes monthly. While no one can accurately predict the future price of gas, the track record of these new companies shows that it is extremely unlikely customers will save money.

For example, as of Sept. 10, one supplier was offering to lock consumers into a price of about $1.16 per therm for four to five years. Yet, Bloomington's natural gas prices have only reached that level once in Illinois history—and that was for only two months. The September price for Peoples Gas and Nicor Gas is about 66 cents per therm.

CUB will be working with social-service agencies, community groups and local officials to get the word out to consumers about the risks of switching gas service. The organization is urging consumers to protect themselves by following a few simple rules:

- Don't give out your utility account number or other personal information to any salesperson at your door or over the phone.
- Don't sign up for new gas service on the spot—in your home or on the phone. These are legally binding contracts and you may be charged hefty termination fees if you change your mind later.
- Call your gas company and ask to be put on the Do Not Market List so the alternative gas suppliers won't bother you. (North Shore Gas: 1-866-556-6005, Nicor Gas: 1-888-642-6748, Peoples Gas: 1-866-556-6001)
- If you're confused by a natural gas plan, call CUB's Consumer Hotline at 1-800-669-5556 or check out the Gas Market Monitor at www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

CUB is a nonprofit, statewide utility watchdog organization created by the state legislature to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers.

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CUB EX. 2.4/c. 5 00000134

CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

208 S. LaSalle St. Suite 1760 • Chicago, IL 60604

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 17, 2007

CONTACT: Pat Clark
312-263-4282

CUB ISSUES CONSUMER ALERT: BEWARE OF NEW GAS COMPANIES, MOST ARE MONEY LOSERS FOR CONSUMERS

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To protect themselves from unwanted gas-company marketing, CUB is urging consumers to sign up for a little-known Do Not Market list managed by the Chicago area's gas utilities. Gas suppliers are required to obtain a copy of the list monthly and purge the names on it from their marketing campaigns.

"Competition in the natural gas market was sold to consumers as a way to lower their heating bills," CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. "But exactly the opposite is happening. Hundreds of thousands of consumers are paying substantially more than they should on their gas bills, often because unregulated suppliers misled them or didn't give them all the facts."

—more—

CUB EX. 2.473.6 00000135