

1 PRESENT CONTINUED:

2 JEANINE ROBINSON

3 SENATOR RAM VILLIVALAM

4 REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS WELCH

5

6 FIRST PANEL:

7 CHARLES MATTHEWS, PEOPLES GAS

8 JOHN HUDSON III, MELVIN WILLIAMS, Nicor Gas

9 RICHARD MARK, AMEREN ILLINOIS

10 JOE DOMINGUEZ, COMED

11 JUSTIN LADNER, ILLINOIS AMERICAN WATER

12

13 SECOND PANEL:

14 CHARLES MATTHEWS, ILLINOIS UTILITY BUSINESS

15 DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

16 CRAIG BLANCHETTE, AQUA AMERICA

17 NAKHIA MORRISSETTE, SOLAR ENERGY INDUSTRIES

18 ASSOCIATION

19 KEVIN WRIGHT, ILLINOIS COMPETITIVE ENERGY ASSOCIATION

20

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1 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: I'm going to do a quick
2 sound check just before I do roll.

3 Commissioner Bocanegra?

4 COMMISSIONER BOCANEGRA: Here.

5 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Okay. Commissioner
6 Oliva?

7 COMMISSIONER OLIVA: Here.

8 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Commissioner Carrigan.
9 I just want to make sure I can hear you.

10 Commissioner Carrigan, are you on?
11 If you are, we can't hear you.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Let me unmute it.

13 Go ahead, try now,

14 Commissioner Carrigan.

15 COMMISSIONER CARRIGAN: Commissioner Carrigan
16 in Springfield. Can you hear me?

17 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Great. Yeah, we can
18 hear you. That's great. Thanks.

19 Senator Villivalam, are you on?
20 Senator, are you there? We can't hear you if you
21 are.

22 SENATOR VILLIVALAM: Hello. Good morning. I

1 apologize for the delay.

2 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: No worries. Good
3 morning. Thanks for checking in.

4 And then, Representative Welch, are
5 you there?

6 REPRESENTATIVE WELCH: I am here. Good
7 morning.

8 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Great. Thank you.
9 Okay. I'm going to go ahead and call the meeting
10 to order.

11 Thank you for everyone's flexibility.
12 This is obviously our first virtual policy session,
13 so it may not be 100 percent smooth, but we're
14 excited to be here.

15 Under the Open Meetings Act and in
16 accordance with the governor's executive order, I
17 call the Annual Supplier Diversity Session to
18 order.

19 I am going to call role again for the
20 record.

21 Commissioner Bocanegra.

22 COMMISSIONER BOCANEGRA: I'm here. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Commissioner Carrigan?

2 COMMISSIONER CARRIGAN: Here.

3 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Commissioner Kimbrel?

4 COMMISSIONER KIMBREL: Here.

5 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Commissioner Oliva?

6 COMMISSIONER OLIVA: Here.

7 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Carrie Zalewski is here
8 so we have all five Commissioners and we have a
9 quorum.

10 Welcome to the 5th Annual Supplier
11 Diversity Policy Session at the Illinois Commerce
12 Commission. The Illinois Commerce Commission began
13 holding policy sessions to report supply chain
14 diversity spent by large utilities five years ago,
15 and every year has seen positive gains both
16 reflecting a clear and continuous commitment to
17 communities of color and the desire to reflect the
18 diversity of the state.

19 During the previous five years,
20 utilities with minority, women and veteran owned
21 businesses grew from an average of 15 percent to
22 nearly one third of all procurement spending, but

1 work still remains. This year is particularly
2 important to ensure diverse and small businesses
3 throughout Illinois are supported and have an equal
4 opportunity to the contracts awarded by some of the
5 state's largest utilities. As Illinois grapples
6 with the impacts of COVID-19, persons of color and
7 the small businesses they operate have been hit the
8 hardest by the pandemic. Our new director of
9 Diversity and Community Affairs, who you'll hear
10 from soon, Jeanine Robinson, has done an incredible
11 job in her first year of managing the reporting and
12 organizing this policy session. Under her
13 leadership, the ICC now collaborates with other
14 state agencies including DCEO and CMS to promote
15 workshops designed to solicit opportunities from
16 diverse vendors. The Commission also closely works
17 with grassroots organizations promoting communities
18 of color and women owned businesses including
19 RACIA, CMSDC and WBDC to spread the word. The
20 Commission remains committed to continuously
21 thinking through ways that we can expand
22 opportunities and ensure that we support these

1 businesses that have been historically left behind.

2 A quick housekeeping item before I go
3 over the agenda briefly. Usually when we have this
4 in person, people have the ability to ask questions
5 at the end and, of course, since we're all tuning
6 in remotely, what we're going to do is ask if you
7 have questions and if there is time, please email
8 your question to icc.diversity@illinois.gov.

9 Again, icc.d-i-v-e-r-s-i-t-y@illinois.gov.

10 There is going to be two panels, so
11 if you have questions for the first panel, please
12 try to get them in by the end of the panel and I
13 will receive them and read them, again, if there is
14 time after the Commissioners' questions and then
15 same thing with the second panel.

16 So we have two panels today on our
17 agenda. First, we're going to hear from the
18 presidents and CEOs of the largest utilities about
19 their diverse spend over the previous year, then
20 we'll hear about the future of supplier diversity
21 from association heads and a medium utility who has
22 begun voluntarily reporting to the Commission. But

1 first, we have asked two elected officials who are
2 fierce advocates for minority, women and veteran
3 owned businesses in Illinois. First, Senator Ram
4 Villivalam, who represents the 8th District in
5 Chicago, and the senator is also the chairman of
6 the Supplier Diversity Committee and the chairman
7 of the Transportation Committee. After Senator
8 Villivalam, we'll hear from representative Chris
9 Welch, who represents the people of the near west
10 side and currently chairs the House Executive
11 Committee and also sits on the Revenue and Finance
12 Committee.

13 Senator, you may begin.

14 SENATOR VILLIVALAM: Good morning, everyone.
15 As was mentioned by the chairwoman, my name is Ram
16 Villivalam, the state senator for the 8th District,
17 which includes about 21 neighborhoods in the city
18 of Chicago from Albany Park to West Rogers Park,
19 Lincolnwood, Skokie, Niles, Morton Grove, Glenview
20 and unincorporated Des Plaines.

21 I was sworn in last January, and it
22 has been, honestly, quite a couple years and great

1 to be with such a mix of new legislators and, you
2 know, folks that have institutional law knowledge,
3 excuse me, like my good friend, Representative
4 Chris Welch, so it's an honor to be here with him
5 as well.

6 A special thank you to the chairwoman
7 and Jeanine Robinson, Sarah Ryan, everyone at ICC
8 for your work to make this event happen, but also
9 your work through this year, this pandemic. I feel
10 like many of us can write books about what has
11 happened over the last six months. And I do have
12 to apologize in advance, you might hear a
13 2-year-old run in, and I apologize if there's some
14 yelling going on, but, you know, as was mentioned,
15 I am chair of the Transportation Committee, and I
16 do look at that role -- I have worked in that role
17 to ensure that our infrastructure from our
18 transportation to our utilities is up to date for
19 the safety of our residents. That's our No. 1
20 priority as legislators, as the Pritzker
21 Administration, government officials, making sure
22 that our residents are safe and that -- it all

1 happens -- it all takes place, including the
2 supplier and contracting aspect in a data-driven
3 transparent and equitable manner.

4 And so what does that mean? And I
5 kind of break things down into different buckets.
6 I would say the first part is the contracting side.
7 I think that means making sure the RFP process is
8 acceptable and understandable. There's no question
9 we need inclusive growth. Our RFP process must
10 facilitate a diverse group of business owners
11 receiving and carrying out state contracts, and it
12 must be as transparent as possible. And the next
13 bucket is where we spend our dollars in the state.
14 We must spend equitably and responsibly. We need
15 to use a data-driven process to systematically
16 amend and build infrastructure based on where it's
17 needed most. And then lastly, I would say we need
18 to continue our work to exceed our DBE and MBE
19 goals. Goals are meant to be a floor, not a
20 ceiling, and I would say as it relates to the
21 conversations that I have had, both as chair of
22 Transportation and chair of the Supplier Diversity

1 Committee, there are other areas that we need to
2 continue to improve on, including making sure that
3 our DBE and MBE companies have access to capital.
4 Making sure that we -- and we're talking about this
5 with IDOT and the tollway, we resurrect minority
6 and protege relationships and even formalize a
7 program to kind of foster that relationship, that
8 work, you know, partnership, I should say, and
9 also, making sure that it's easier for DBE and MBE
10 companies, and quite honestly, every company to
11 have a streamline interaction with their
12 government.

13 One of the things that I worked on,
14 you know, on the transportation side of things is
15 on the electronic signature front. Making sure
16 that, you know, during the course of this pandemic,
17 we're not having small companies that may, you
18 know, have a tighter cash flow situation wait, you
19 know, for hard signatures, and so those are the
20 small things that I think make a big difference to
21 companies that are DBE, MBE, and other small
22 companies as well.

1 I think more than anything, I want to
2 make sure that people know that my office door is
3 always open. I want to keep an open dialogue on
4 these issues. We have held -- on our
5 Transportation Committee, we have held two virtual
6 hearings covering these topics of transparency,
7 diversity, equity, and I want to continue to have
8 those conversations across the board, and I, more
9 than anything, want to be a partner. We have a lot
10 of work to do in the state of Illinois. We were
11 headed in the right direction, you know, obviously
12 the pandemic, and economic downturn, the civil
13 unrest, you name it, we have experienced it in
14 2020. And so we're going to, you know, roll up our
15 sleeves again after our historic session last year
16 in 2019 and work to, you know, move our state
17 forward and make sure that our residents, once
18 again, our No. 1 priority being their safety.

19 So with that, I just want to thank
20 you all for having me here. Please know that you
21 have a partner and -- that has a willingness to
22 engage in open dialogue and solve some of these

1 critically important challenges that we're facing.
2 And once again, thank you to the chairwoman and
3 ICC. I do believe the work that they're doing is
4 putting us on the path in the right direction and
5 just -- you can hear the DBE, you know, change from
6 15 percent to 33 percent. That's a big step
7 forward, and we need to continue to move in that
8 direction.

9 So with that, thank you, again, for
10 having me. We have survived a 2-year-old not
11 coming in and that's a success in itself, and I
12 will hand it back over to the chairwoman.

13 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Thank you, Senator.

14 Representative Welch.

15 REPRESENTATIVE WELCH: Well, good morning,
16 Madam Chair. Thank you so much for this invitation
17 to speak to you all this morning. It's truly an
18 honor and a privilege. I'm truly honored to be on
19 here also with my friend and my colleague, Senator
20 Villivalam. You know, I didn't know we got
21 permission to dress like college students today,
22 otherwise I would have also taken my jeans off that

1 I'm in right now, you know, or not put on this neck
2 tie. You know, it's great to be with all of you
3 this morning. You don't have to worry about my
4 kids, actually, I'm lucky enough that they are in
5 the hybrid and chose in-person, but my dog does not
6 go anywhere around this house without me. So he is
7 sitting near me, and if you hear him bark suddenly,
8 that's because a mailman or an Amazon man or
9 someone is in earshot. So let me apologize ahead
10 of time for my dog, Rico.

11 I'll tell you -- again, it's a
12 pleasure to be with all of you. I see a number of
13 faces that I'm very familiar with, so good to see
14 you all here this morning. This is an issue that I
15 have been very passionate about my entire eight
16 years in the general assembly even before I was
17 named chair of the Executive Committee, when I
18 chaired the Higher Education Committee. I always
19 look at, you know, things from an equity lens. You
20 know, I have been a lawyer practicing law for
21 23 years; I worked with several governmental
22 entities in that capacity; I have also served as

1 pro bono legal counsel for a number of nonprofit
2 entities, including the Chicago Minority Supplier
3 Diversity Council, and I get great pleasure out of
4 working pro bono with that organization because
5 what they are doing -- their mission is something
6 that I'm very passionate about, and that's supplier
7 diversity.

8 In my time in the House of
9 Representatives, even before the Senator became the
10 Senator, and, you know, he was in the space working
11 for -- on behalf of the most vulnerable. You know,
12 we championed issues like supplier diversity in
13 higher education at all of our colleges and
14 universities. We championed supplier diversity in
15 insurance, with insurance companies. We championed
16 supplier diversity with our managed care
17 organizations. The state of Illinois has issued
18 probably one of largest procurements in the history
19 of this state when it comes to health care and, you
20 know, we want to make sure that everyone is
21 involved in the contracting and that space, and
22 similarly here, in the utility industry. You know,

1 I think it's extremely important that in these --
2 in this day and age, in this moment in history, in
3 this watershed moment in history, that we are
4 extremely mindful of equity. Well, we should be
5 mindful of equity at all times, but I think what
6 has been going on in our country, in our state
7 since the spring and summer, it just has brought
8 extra attention to the things that we have been
9 fighting for several years now. Over the summer, I
10 had filed two additional bills that are in line
11 with this passion. I filed HB5806, which is trying
12 to get the banking industry to be more diverse in
13 its practices from its board to its lending
14 practices, but I'm also filing HB5824, a bill that
15 I'm sure many of you are aware of, which I'm
16 working very closely with the Department of
17 Commerce and Economic Opportunity on a supplier
18 diversity initiative. I think it's extremely
19 important that we have programs and workshops and
20 things of that nature to help prepare companies to
21 be available from the opportunities that you
22 present, because many times, the companies just

1 aren't ready at the moment that you're ready to put
2 out RFPs and RFGs and things of that nature. So I
3 think working with the Department of Commerce and
4 Economic Opportunities to get our businesses better
5 prepared will help. I will fulfill the need for
6 contractors when you're ready for them, and I'm
7 hoping that you're going to put them to work;
8 you're going to put them to work.

9 You know, and one thing, you know,
10 Senator and I will tell you is we're watching.
11 We're watching closely because you all are spending
12 millions and billions of dollars and we want to
13 make sure that is spent equitably, and in this day
14 and age, if we're going to address a lot of the
15 things, for instance, that's going on in the black
16 and brown community, you address it by putting
17 people to work. You address poverty by getting
18 people jobs and you build wealth by, you know,
19 ensuring supplier diversity in all of these areas.

20 So, again, I'm honored to be here
21 with you all this morning, truly honored that Chair
22 Zalewski asked me to speak to you here this morning

1 and I wish you all nothing but good luck this
2 morning on your panel presentations.

3 Thank you, Chairman.

4 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Thank you,
5 Representative and Senator, you are both champions
6 in equity and inclusion, and the state of Illinois
7 is lucky to have you fighting for these issues, so
8 we appreciate it.

9 I'm now going to turn it over to
10 Jeanine to run the first panel.

11 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can
12 you all hear me okay?

13 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: We can hear you.

14 MS. ROBINSON: Okay. Thank you.

15 Thank you Senator Villivalam and
16 Representative Welch for your -- for speaking with
17 us and joining us today.

18 Good morning, again, and thank you
19 all for joining the Illinois Commerce Commission
20 for our Annual Utility Supplier Diversity Policy
21 Session. Again, I'm Jeanine Robinson, the director
22 of Diversity and Community Affairs. I am excited

1 to be a part of my first Supplier Diversity Policy
2 Session. I will be the moderator for both panels
3 today.

4 Per Section 5-117, a portion of it
5 reflects that our Public Utilities Act requires the
6 large regulated utilities to report on their
7 diverse supplier goals and actual spending on the
8 diverse suppliers in the previous calendar year.

9 During our first panel, the CEOs will
10 share their company's highlights and diversities
11 spent overall. We will also hear about the best
12 practices, challenges, plans going forward,
13 adjustments they have had to make during the
14 pandemic -- during this year's pandemic, and any
15 new disparities that they may have services.

16 Each CEO will have, approximately,
17 five minutes or so to present. That will be
18 followed by the question and answer session. As
19 always, the Chairman and Commissioners are welcome
20 to ask questions throughout the session. If time
21 permits, we will address questions submitted from
22 the public via email. Again, the email address is

1 icc.diversity@Illinois.gov. For the participants,
2 if you're not presenting, please mute your devices.

3 Again, let's begin with Charles
4 Matthews from Peoples Gas, John Hudson III from
5 Nicor, Richard Mark of Ameren Illinois, Joe
6 Dominguez from ComEd, and finally, Justin Ladner of
7 Illinois American Water.

8 Charles, would you like to begin?

9 MR. MATTHEWS: Thank you, Jeanine.

10 Good morning, can you guys hear me?
11 Hello?

12 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: We can hear you.

13 MR. MATTHEWS: Okay. Very good.

14 Good morning, Chairman Zalewski,
15 members of the Commission and ICC staffers. Last
16 year when we had this symposium, Chairman, I think
17 you promised us that you would try to change up
18 this format. Little did we know that that meant
19 going virtual and having me going first where I
20 have typically gone last. So quite interesting
21 changes here.

22 Let me, first of all, thank the two

1 legislators for their support, their words of
2 encouragement and coming and being with us this
3 morning. I always look forward to speaking to you
4 about our Supplier Diversity Program and I wish we
5 could all be together this morning. As the two
6 legislators have said, these are exceptional times
7 for all of us, but despite the challenges, I'm very
8 pleased that our Supplier Diversity Program is
9 performing well again this year.

10 I'll talk more about that in a
11 moment, but first, let me tell you how we did last
12 year. In 2019 we spent more than \$142 million
13 through our Supplier Diversity Program. It was the
14 third consecutive year we spent more than
15 \$125 million with diverse suppliers. That's more
16 than twice the amount spent in 2015. When WEC
17 Energy Group, a part of Peoples Gas and North Shore
18 Gas, spent on diverse suppliers accounted for
19 nearly 24 percent of our total procurement in 2019.
20 That's a record high for us, and we continue to
21 raise the bar each year, as you can see on this
22 chart.

1 71 percent of our diverse spending in
2 2019 was with Illinois-based companies. That
3 represents more than \$100 million spent with
4 businesses that employ Illinois workers.

5 66 percent of our total diverse spent was with
6 businesses owned by minorities. In all, MBEs are
7 \$94 million through or Supplier Diversity Program.

8 A third of our diverse spending, nearly
9 \$47 million, was with businesses owned by women.

10 59 percent was with Tier 2 suppliers representing
11 more than \$83 million. And finally, 26 percent was
12 with firms that provide professional services
13 accounted for more than \$37 million.

14 The \$37 million we spent on
15 professional services was one of the key drivers of
16 our success in 2019. It was the highest amount we
17 have ever spent in the category and represented a 9
18 percent increase over 2018. Our system
19 monetization program continues to be the bedrock of
20 our Supplier Diversity Program.

21 Last year \$54 million of our diverse
22 spent was through SMP, more than a third, and we're

1 committed to sustaining that level of spending as
2 we continue to modernize our delivery system. I'm
3 pleased to report SMP has kept our Supplier
4 Diversity Program on track to reach our goal in
5 2020, even in the midst of the pandemic. That has
6 enabled us to keep hundreds of workers employed at
7 a time when so many are out of work.

8 Another key driver last year was our
9 Facilities of the Future Program, under which we're
10 building safer, more efficient workplaces that
11 better serve our customers. The program targets 50
12 percent of its spending on diverse firms. I'm
13 proud to say we have exceeded that goal in 2019 and
14 are on track to do so again. This year we have
15 opened the doors to new shops for our north and
16 central districts and new logistics support
17 facility at our campus in Little Village. More
18 projects like those are in the works providing
19 additional economic opportunities through 2021.

20 Growing our Supplier Diversity
21 Program continues to be a top priority in our
22 strategic plan. As I have said before, supplier

1 diversity is one of our key corporate values. That
2 means integrating supplier diversity goals into our
3 annual budget and planning process. As part of
4 that effort, we set an overall supplier diversity
5 goal based on our total plan procurement spent. We
6 monitor our progress towards those goals throughout
7 the year. We make every effort to utilize local
8 companies. This allows us to make a larger impact
9 in the communities where we live and work. As I
10 have mentioned in the past, we set diversity
11 expectations for our major prime suppliers. We
12 expect them to meet a minimum diverse spending
13 level of 20 percent of the work they perform. Many
14 of them have exceeded that goal.

15 Wherever possible, we explore the use
16 of joint ventures. Joint ventures help Tier 2
17 companies gain the expertise and capabilities to
18 become Tier 1 companies, and that's a big focus of
19 ours: Working closely with our high performing
20 Tier 2 companies to make the transition to Tier 1.

21 In addition to joint ventures, we use
22 pilot programs in which diverse suppliers can

1 demonstrate their abilities to perform and operate
2 independently. We also continue to encourage prime
3 suppliers to participate in our mentoring process
4 with Tier 2 suppliers. And finally, we're
5 considering ways for diverse suppliers to address
6 challenges they face to access and capital, which,
7 as you know, is an area for many companies seeking
8 to expand their business. Together, all of these
9 practices have helped us consistently meet our
10 supplier diversity goals in recent years and
11 positions us as well for the future.

12 In closing, let me say a few words
13 about the future of supplier diversity programs.
14 The racial and social justice movement that is
15 unfolding has highlighted a multitude of
16 disparities that remain in our nation today. Many
17 of these disparities are economic. Too many of our
18 people lack opportunity or lack the education to
19 seize opportunities already available to them. We
20 can, and we must do better. That makes Supplier
21 Diversity Programs more important than ever. Good
22 supplier diversity programs do more than simply

1 earmark funds for diverse companies. Good programs
2 mentor companies and connect them with larger firms
3 to help develop their expertise. So I think it's
4 fair to say that corporate responsibility
5 increasingly will be measured by the success of
6 supplier diversity programs, and even more
7 importantly, how well those programs respond to the
8 needs of the communities they serve.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to
10 present this morning. I will be happy to answer
11 any questions you may have.

12 MR. HUDSON: Good morning. I'd like to thank
13 the ICC for hosting us today. I'm pleased to be
14 here to speak about our 2019 supplier diversity
15 goals and our 2020 supplier diversity goals and
16 objectives for Nicor Gas.

17 First, as the new president and CEO
18 of Nicor gas, I'd like to thank Melvin Williams,
19 who is sitting here right next to me for his
20 unwavering commitment and tireless service. Under
21 Melvin's leadership, our supplier diversity spent
22 has more than doubled in the last five years. So

1 if you have any questions, please direct those
2 questions to Melvin D. Williams.

3 The five-year spend trend shows the
4 result of our commitment to expand the inclusion,
5 development and utilization of diverse benefits.
6 Today I'm pleased to report that we achieved 47
7 percent of the company's forceable spent with
8 minority, women and veteran owned business
9 enterprises resulting in \$462 million. This is
10 approximately 34 percent -- is a 34 percent
11 increase over 2018 and is a direct reflection of
12 our commitment to supplier diversity as a key
13 business impairment. A great deal of our
14 achievement was driven in part by our
15 infrastructure improvement initiative, also known
16 as Investing in Illinois, which began in 2014. We
17 increased our diverse spent from \$125 million in
18 2018 to \$279 million in 2019, the largest
19 investment today, which is the result of our
20 intentional effort to expand opportunities with
21 diverse businesses and strengthen our diverse
22 business partnerships across all of our business.

1 Over the past few years we recognized
2 that our engagement with diverse businesses in the
3 professional services category was an area where we
4 have experienced some challenges. In 2019, we were
5 very intentional in our efforts to engage with
6 diverse businesses in this category and focus on
7 identifying potential opportunities. We had a
8 14.2 percent year-over-year increase in minority,
9 women and veteran owned spent for professional
10 services with a 22 percent increase in professional
11 services spent with minority business enterprises
12 from the prior year. Our partnership with Ariel
13 Investments, headquartered here in Illinois, is
14 just one of the diverse businesses that as
15 attributed to the increase in this area.

16 Through our active advocacy effort in
17 support of different organizations that promote the
18 ideas of the supplier diversity and development, we
19 have increased engagements with legal firms, LGBT
20 business enterprises and advocacy organizations.
21 In 2019, our diversity professional attended the
22 National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

1 International Business and Leadership Conference
2 and the National Association of Minority and Women
3 owned Law Firm's annual meeting and law firm expo
4 for the first time as corporate sponsor.

5 Engagement and advocacy efforts such as these
6 reassures our commitment to having a diverse
7 supplier base that represents the communities we
8 serve.

9 The Nicor Gas Career Academy, a
10 six-week job readiness program designed to prepare
11 participants for entry level work in the utility
12 industry held two cohorts in 2019 and grew with
13 contractor partners KS Energy and Entry. Since
14 launching in 2018 with partners NPL Construction
15 Company and the Quad County Urban League, 44
16 percent of the career academy graduates have been
17 offered jobs either through Nicor Gas or its
18 contracting partner. We support diverse businesses
19 because it acts as a stimulant for job creation and
20 economic development, which in turn, creates
21 opportunities to grow our business within our local
22 economy. In 2019, we completed a thorough

1 assessment of our sourcing needs in order to
2 identify the level of diverse representation within
3 sourcing category. This assessment allows us to
4 strategically engage and develop diverse businesses
5 in order to support operational needs while growing
6 our network of diverse businesses partners.

7 One example is Pipe Strong, LLC, our
8 contracting partner for gas distribution and
9 pipeline construction services with a local
10 presence in Illinois. Nicor Gas is currently
11 mentoring them and has a plan to grow them
12 internally to become a strategic partner. Since we
13 began our relationship with Pipe Strong in 2018,
14 Pipe Strong has increased their number of working
15 crew from 2 to 25. Nicor Gas's energy efficiency
16 program actively engages diverse businesses and
17 program design, implementation and support
18 activities and identifies opportunities to assist
19 the leverage the companies supplier diversity
20 resources to enhance utilization and success of
21 diverse businesses. In 2019, that program nearly
22 doubled its diverse spent from 8.62 million in

1 2018, to \$16.45 million. We emphasize the use of
2 diverse subcontractors and increase Tier 2 diverse
3 spent by adding four new Tier 2 diverse
4 subcontractors, thus increasing Tier 2 diverse
5 spent from \$145,000 in 2018, to \$698,000 in 2019.

6 In closing, these are only a few
7 examples of the objectives that will help us
8 continue the momentum forward. We are currently
9 executing our 2020 business diversity plan and are
10 on track to achieve our 2020 performance results
11 despite having to pivot due to the pandemic. Like
12 everyone else, we had to reevaluate and readjust
13 our engagement with our diverse partners to ensure
14 we were remaining impactful and helping to make
15 valuable connections. We transitioned to develop
16 business partners through a digital adoption
17 approach. While aggressive goal setting is a part
18 of our strategic plan, our effort continues to be
19 broader than achieving a specific number. We aim
20 to consensually engrain diversity in all aspects of
21 everything we do. As a result of the recent
22 inequity faced by diverse businesses that became

1 more evident during the pandemic, and civil unrest
2 in our communities, we have a new elevated level of
3 commitment to supplier diversity. Our supplier
4 diversity efforts have been expanded to now focus
5 on supplier sustainability. We still have work to
6 do, but we will remain committed and working with
7 business leaders and organizations across our
8 service territory to create jobs and continue
9 promoting diversity, inclusion and equity
10 everywhere we operate.

11 We appreciate and value your
12 partnership and the partnership of the IUBDC as we
13 further our commitment to execute on our business
14 diversity objectives. Thank you, and Melvin and I
15 will entertain any questions you have at the time.

16 MR. MARK: Good morning, Jeanine. Would you
17 just like me to begin? It's Richard Mark with
18 Ameren.

19 MS. ROBINSON: Good morning. Yes, please, go
20 ahead.

21 MR. MARK: Okay. Thank you. Well, good
22 morning, everyone and greetings to Chairman

1 Zalewski and the other Commissioners that are
2 there. It's a pleasure to be able to speak with
3 you today about the steps that we're taking at
4 Ameren Illinois to support and increase the
5 utilization of minority, women and veteran owned
6 business in our supply chain. Before I start this
7 morning, I would like to just -- on our update of
8 2019 and 2020, I would like to just take a moment
9 to share some of the issues of diversity equity and
10 inclusion as a whole that we, as a company and
11 corporate, Ameren Corporation are really looking at
12 and concerned about and trying to grow.

13 The last several months have been
14 particularly sobering due to the pandemic as well
15 as the civil unrest that we're witnessing and the
16 protest of racial inequality. As a company, our
17 position on this matter is very clear. We believe
18 that there's no place for discrimination, racism or
19 intolerance of any kind at Ameren, in the
20 communities we serve, in our country or anywhere
21 around the world. We believe that having a diverse
22 and inclusive workforce is imperative for any

1 top-performing company. Internally, we have
2 recommitted ourselves to fostering a culture where
3 diversity, equity and inclusion is supported and
4 valued, and to that, we have included a formal
5 adoption of diversity, equity and inclusion as one
6 of our core values as a corporation. Not only is
7 this focus on diversity the right thing to do, but
8 quite frankly, it will help us more effectively
9 deliver on our mission to power the quality of life
10 for the customers that we serve, and for that
11 reason, I'm extremely pleased to be here today to
12 discuss how we're engaging with diverse suppliers
13 to help us deliver safe, reliable energy to the
14 1.2 million electric customers we serve in Illinois
15 and more than 800,000 natural gas customers we
16 serve.

17 Turning to Slide 2, as a provider of
18 energy in our state, we understand that we have a
19 unique opportunity and obligation to ensure
20 investments reflect the diversity of the people
21 that we serve. I'm pleased to report that Ameren
22 Illinois' three-year diverse spent has increased by

1 67 percent, from 217 million in 2017 to 362 million
2 in 2019. A little more than 31 percent of our
3 spending last year on goods and services was with
4 diverse spenders. And to better quantify the
5 impact that our diverse spent in 2019 had on not
6 only the communities we serve, but on the state, we
7 worked with a third-party consultant to do --
8 conduct an economic impact study. The key
9 highlights of that economic highlight study showed
10 that the \$363 million in diverse spending in 2019
11 had a total impact of 776 million for our state and
12 supported 3,900 jobs. \$228 million of that total
13 output went directly to employee wages. In this
14 difficult time, that's very, very important to be
15 able to support jobs throughout our state.

16 Turning to slide 3, it details our
17 business diversity performance within the state of
18 Illinois of the hours spent with minority, women
19 and veteran owned business enterprises in 2019.
20 Approximately 43 percent of our \$156 million of
21 Ameren Illinois diverse spending was with companies
22 located in Illinois, and we're proud of what we

1 have accomplished, but while these are just
2 numbers, and they're very important numbers, we
3 believe the bigger story is about the impact that
4 these numbers have on real people. Take, for
5 example, Amanda Endrizzi. What's interesting about
6 this story is Amanda is a board-certified physician
7 assistant. Amanda started off her company as a
8 part-time landscaping, outdoor design service.
9 After struggling numerous years working full-time
10 as a physician assistant and trying to run her own
11 small business, a few years ago she decided to go
12 all in and devote 100 percent of her time to
13 growing Endrizzi Contracting. This company has
14 grown from 4 employees to approximately 50
15 employees. They have created a thriving business
16 in an area where meaningful career and employment
17 opportunities are limited. The company has grown
18 from 4 employees to over 50, and if any of you have
19 been to Vienna, Illinois, down in Johnson County,
20 you'll know that creating 46 new jobs has a
21 significant economic impact on that small
22 community. So with that -- and she -- and

1 increased her contract with us from 210,000 last
2 year to \$1.7 million here today.

3 Another example is GIVSCO
4 Construction. In the picture, there you will see
5 Ron, Ron Givens Senior and his son. Both Ron is a
6 certified minority business and veteran owned
7 business. Ron refers to himself as a former Marine
8 and serial entrepreneur. Ron started his first
9 business back in 1998, but he continues to try to
10 grow that business which was just a materials
11 supply company until he finally, in 2011, created
12 GIVSCO, and GIVSCO is a building and construction
13 operations company, and in 2018, he partnered with
14 River City Construction on the state of the art
15 \$22 million gas operations cinder that we built in
16 Peoria, Illinois. That is just two examples of
17 companies that we -- that have done extremely well
18 and that we have grown through our supplier
19 diversity company's effort here at Ameren Illinois.

20 Another thing that we're extremely
21 proud of is our new contract opportunities. In
22 2019, Ameren Illinois created new contract

1 opportunities for 52 businesses -- diverse
2 businesses and key categories, including energy
3 delivery and maintenance, vegetation management,
4 professional service and several others. One of
5 the projects that I'm extremely proud of is our
6 diverse energy efficiency program. So several of
7 the Commissioners that have been on the Commission
8 since 2018 may remember the controversy that came
9 up in our energy efficiency program when we put
10 aside a small \$7 million for bringing diverse
11 companies into the energy efficiency space. So I'm
12 proud to report that our initial goal of 17 million
13 was far exceeded. Over \$17 million last year was
14 spent with diverse suppliers and diverse program
15 allies. And in addition to that, we were able
16 to -- let me back up. In addition to that we were
17 able to provide 77 workforce-development
18 opportunities and 36 scholarship opportunities for
19 students who are interested in the energy
20 efficiency space to go to six different community
21 colleges that we have partnered with. And with the
22 diverse program allies on energy efficiency, one of

1 the programs that we started was our smart saver
2 program, which resulted in us being able to deliver
3 and install 6,000 smart thermostats in 12
4 economically challenged communities. Excuse me.

5 So as we continue to look at COVID,
6 and I know that's one of the things that we were
7 asked to address, but as we move forward, we were
8 on track to meet -- or exceed our supplier
9 diversity goals for the year and in fact, for the
10 first nine months of the year, January through
11 September, we were trending upward in our forecast,
12 but COVID definitely has had a -- required us to
13 look at things differently. Our safety
14 expectations, our contractors and inhouse personnel
15 must conduct temperature checks each day on the
16 job, wear masks, maintain social distancing. All
17 of those have been challenges, but with those
18 challenges, we have also -- we're very happy to
19 report that we haven't had any major slowdowns or
20 stoppages. We have adjusted to how we do business.

21 In addition, we do realize that with
22 COVID-19, the challenges that it brings not only to

1 our employees and getting their work done, but on
2 the communities and our customers that we serve.
3 Ameren Illinois has directed approximately \$400,000
4 in charitable donations to business -- to
5 charitable organizations in the community for COVID
6 relief. We have allocated more than \$9 million for
7 financial relief to customers that have experienced
8 hardship, and one of the areas that has come out of
9 COVID is the opportunity to work with more diverse
10 suppliers and spend another 5.7 million on PPE.
11 Since March, 30 percent of those dollars have been
12 with diverse suppliers. So approximately two
13 thirds of that diverse spent has been with diverse
14 suppliers in the state of Illinois also.

15 So I assure you that, as chairman and
16 president of Ameren Illinois, I personally am
17 invested in increasing opportunities for diverse
18 owners and businesses and continue to challenge all
19 of my business line leadership supplier diversity
20 team and supply chain to be more active and more
21 engaged in providing more opportunities. But
22 before I close, I'd like to just mention that

1 Ameren Corporation continues to rank as a national
2 leader for its commitment to diversity and
3 inclusion and we rank by DiversityInc.

4 We appreciate the partnership and
5 support of this body. The ICC has done a
6 tremendous job in promoting supplier diversity in
7 the state of Illinois and with the utilities, and
8 we appreciate that, and all the stakeholders as we
9 work to build on that momentum for the future. And
10 as I close, I would be remissed if I didn't express
11 some disappointment and yet some challenge to bring
12 up and talk in one of the recent working groups on
13 energy. A comment in a document was submitted that
14 says that there should be more done on reporting by
15 utilities in the state of Illinois. That the ICC
16 should focus more on diversity and spend in the
17 state of Illinois. I think that maybe the writers
18 of that document failed to attend any of the last
19 five supplier diversity meetings that we held every
20 day, and I doubt if any of them are on the call or
21 the video, but I would just hope to see and
22 challenge every state agency and renewable energy

1 developer to meet and beat the commitment and
2 diversity achievements set by the five companies
3 represented on this call today.

4 Thank you for your time and
5 opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

6 MR. DOMINGUEZ: Jeanine, it's Joe Dominguez.
7 I think I'm going next. Is that all right?

8 MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

9 MR. DOMINGUEZ: Okay. Well, good morning,
10 everyone. Chair Zalewski, members of the
11 Commission, thank you, again, for holding this
12 forum for us to talk about our shared commitments
13 to supplier diversity, and Jeanine, I want to
14 commend you on your executive decision right off
15 the bat to have Charles Matthews lead the
16 discussion as -- later today I'm going to let you
17 in on a little secret. Later today I'm going to
18 nominate Charles to serve an additional five years
19 as the IUBDC chairman. He has done such a
20 fantastic job. One of the benefits of coming
21 behind Charles and my other fellow CEOs and
22 presidents is that I quickly get to join in their

1 comments and the sentiment they expressed about the
2 need to continue to focus on this issue,
3 particularly, yeah, given the challenges that these
4 communities face today. The Commission's
5 leadership on this not only here in Illinois, but
6 across the nation has been amazing. This
7 Commission has stood as a beacon across the country
8 for the need to focus on the equitable spent, and I
9 can tell you that whether you go to neighborhood
10 meetings or any other industry meeting, it is often
11 referred to as kind of a special leadership
12 position that Illinois has, and I'm glad here at
13 ComEd we are a part of that story. I think
14 Representative Welch said it best when he said that
15 so many of the equity issues that we face today can
16 be traced back to the lack of jobs and economic
17 opportunities in many of these communities, and
18 we're making a difference on that. Myesha is
19 controlling the slides, so I'm going to ask her to
20 turn to the next slide which summarizes the
21 numbers.

22 And so what you can see here is that

1 ComEd last year spent almost three quarters of a
2 billion dollars with businesses owned by women and
3 people of color, and we have been knocking on the
4 door at 40 percent for probably about three years.
5 We got to 39 percent in 2018, and I'm glad to
6 report that in 2019 we broke down that door and we
7 got to 41 percent; you see the remainder numbers
8 here.

9 For context, if you look back at our
10 progress, if we went back to 2012, the amount of
11 money was \$253 million, and so we have increased
12 that sizably. Today we're at about 300 percent of
13 the \$253 million numbers, and likewise in the
14 category of the percentage we have spent, that has
15 gone up year over year, and as I said, we were able
16 to break through a barrier this year for us and
17 reaching 41 percent. And I think the success story
18 there just goes back to the recognition that we
19 needed to invest in the system and that, while we
20 did that, we needed to tackle this equity issue and
21 increase the amount spent with the diverse
22 spenders. And so the improvements we have made

1 have resulted in profound impacts to reliability,
2 but they have also substantially moved the needle
3 and really created an economy here that really
4 needed a kick in the butt and got it. So good
5 story here.

6 I do want to end my comments in
7 talking about some of the challenges that COVID has
8 presented. I think the initial speaker on today's
9 call referenced the fact that COVID presents a
10 significant and disproportionate risk to some of
11 our diverse businesses, and I want to talk about
12 that because I do think it's an area that is worthy
13 of putting on the Commission's radar screen for
14 examination, and making sure that we come out of
15 this crisis just as strong or stronger than we went
16 in. And that being, one of the things that we
17 focused on as we were looking at increased spent
18 for PPE, and all things, really, all the way up to
19 legal services and different medical services in
20 response to the COVID-19 crisis that we put in
21 place and processed to ensure that the vendors that
22 we select for those specialty services are diverse,

1 and Mark Richard just reported for Ameren we have
2 had some very good success in that area and looking
3 forward to accumulating the data and presenting it
4 to you next year in our 2020 report.

5 In terms of the impact of our diverse
6 suppliers on the performance of the system, I think
7 it's sufficient to say that we just went through,
8 over the last month, the worst storm in the
9 recorded history of ComEd where we faced
10 100-mile-per-hour winds. Across our service
11 territory, we had 13 tornadoes land, 4,300
12 lightning strikes, we had golf ball-sized hail in
13 some of the service territory, and it was really
14 our diverse supply chain that we were able to
15 leverage, and we were able to restore about 500,000
16 of the 900,000 customers that were affected within
17 the first 24 hours. That was a record for our
18 company. And we have since done an engineering
19 analysis to determine the impact of the investments
20 on the storm and what we concluded is that in the
21 absence of having made these necessary investments,
22 we would have had, instead of about, like I said,

1 900,000 customers out, we would have had more like
2 1.6 million customers out, and instead of being
3 able to restore power, we were at 97 percent
4 restored, remember this was a Monday storm, and we
5 were 97 percent restored by Friday. I think we
6 would have seen some of the longer duration
7 restoration efforts like we saw in Iowa, which
8 faced, you know, the similar weather patterns. The
9 success story there has been our distributed
10 automation equipment, the different smart systems
11 that we have put into the grid to sectionalize the
12 system. I want to commend KDM Engineering, which
13 is a group led by Kimberly Moore, and Kimberly has
14 previously appeared before the Commission, but
15 their work on the grid really was incredibly
16 meaningful as the advanced communications and smart
17 devices that were installed were able to really
18 sectionalize problem areas and greatly reduce the
19 amount of time it took us to restore the system.

20 So as we look forward and we think
21 about the investments we need to make in the system
22 led by our REACT program, which is an acronym. It

1 stands for renewable energy advance control and
2 telemetry system that we will use to control
3 storage and other distributed energy resources on
4 the system, deal with cyber security and replace
5 and antique a communication system that we have a
6 compra wire system in parts of our service
7 territory. We're going to be looking at developing
8 this bench of diverse suppliers that can do things
9 like fiber installation and work with some of the
10 new communication technologies that are going to
11 need to be the bedrock of this new system. Energy
12 efficiency, of course, is going to continue to be a
13 major focus of ours.

14 I want to give a shoutout to one of
15 our partners, Lauren Castenini. She was the
16 founder of Resource Innovations. They were
17 established in Chicago in 2018, and last month, her
18 company was named Inc. Magazine's list of
19 fastest-growing private firms, and it's a great
20 testament to the innovation that she and her team
21 bring and the benefit that they provide to ComEd's
22 Illinois families and businesses.

1 I would like to acknowledge another
2 leader, again, Steve Davis, someone who I think all
3 of you are familiar with. Steve is the founder and
4 chairman of The Will Group. I want to single out
5 Steve because, as we think about having the
6 discussion with our Tier 1 and Tier 2 suppliers to
7 reinvest, just as we reinvest in diverse businesses
8 that they do the same, that they hire diverse
9 employees and that they invest with facilities in
10 areas that desperately need economic development.
11 And so within the next 60 days, The Will Group is
12 going to be opening a 60,000 square foot
13 multipurpose facility in Chicago's North Lawndale
14 neighborhood. For those of you that are not
15 familiar with the area, that's an area that
16 desperately does need some economic development.
17 So it's good to see these efforts are paying off,
18 and, as I said, I think we have had some very good
19 results this year, but I do want to close out with
20 this word of caution that I had mentioned earlier,
21 and that's that -- and I don't have data right now.
22 Admittedly, this is a bit anecdotal, but I spent a

1 lot of time on the phone with some of the CEOs and
2 presidents of the companies that are handling a lot
3 of our diverse supply spent and they report that
4 they are being negatively impacted by the COVID
5 crisis. Obviously, utility work is not. It's
6 their only line of business for many of the
7 companies and it has been curtailed. And that's
8 probably true for all businesses across America.
9 But unlike more established majority owned
10 businesses, many of these businesses don't have as
11 robust a balance sheet. Cash reserves are a
12 significant issue for a number of the firms, and I
13 don't think we should underestimate the risk to
14 these firms in an economic downturn, either through
15 outright closure or in a circumstance where their
16 business gets swallowed up by larger nondiverse
17 funds. It's just a watch area that I think we need
18 to pay careful attention to. In terms of some of
19 the near term actions we're taking, we're working
20 with some of these vendors to accelerate payments
21 to them, to ensure cash flow. You'd be surprised
22 at how many firms are having trouble making payroll

1 and paying bills throughout this, and many of the
2 firms are looking to ComEd, and I'm sure some of
3 the other utilities here for a longer terms
4 commitment in terms of future work, and that
5 commitment becomes important so that they, in turn,
6 can talk to lenders and others to invest in their
7 businesses. And in a similar vein, I think they're
8 looking at the legislation and things that may
9 affect the regulatory compact here in Illinois and
10 change the trajectory of investments we're making
11 in the system.

12 So I know those are issues that are
13 really in front of the legislature down in
14 Springfield, and certainly ones that the governor's
15 office has weighed in on, but I do know the
16 governor -- this Commission is involved in some of
17 those policy discussions, and I think it's
18 important to share that with you.

19 I'll stop here. I know we're
20 probably running a little bit over our agenda,
21 Jeanine, and I want to give some time back because
22 I do know you have questions.

1 Thank you very much.

2 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you very much. I
3 couldn't unmute myself. And now we will have
4 Justin Ladner from Illinois American Water.

5 MR. LADNER: Thank you, Jeanine.

6 I want to first begin by saying thank
7 you to the Chair, the Commission for allowing
8 American Water to participate today, myself
9 personally. This is my first time in a policy
10 form, and I'm excited to be in front of you today
11 to share the progress that Illinois American Water
12 has made in terms of supplier diversity. We first
13 started this journey in 2015 with the support of
14 the Commission as well as the IUBDC, by which we
15 were founding charter members, and over the next
16 couple of minutes I'm going to share some
17 highlights from our program, but I'm going to first
18 stop and say we clearly acknowledge that while we
19 have made progress, we have a long way to go, and
20 personally, and I speak on behalf of our
21 leadership, we view this as a race that does not
22 have a finish line, and the continuous improvement

1 mindset around that is something that is an
2 expectation from myself as well as the CEO at
3 American Water, Walter Lynch.

4 My plan over the next few minutes is
5 to share a little bit about where we have come
6 from, some of the learnings that we have had since
7 2015 to get our program up and going, some
8 highlights around 2019, and then where we are right
9 now in 2020, as well as some of the COVID impacts,
10 and then some of the challenges and opportunities
11 that we feel are present going forward.

12 So quickly highlighting on some of
13 the takeaways that we noticed that helped our
14 program get up and running. I realize that this
15 audience is very much educated and competent in
16 this area, but I wanted to make sure that I share
17 the fact that getting good meaningful data was --
18 really good, meaningful data was really important
19 to us as we kind of got our program going. The
20 vision powers the mission while in order for us to
21 create the strategy and really know where we were
22 going, we needed to know where we were starting.

1 So meaningful data is really important, put a
2 policy in place using good technology. All of
3 these things contributed to us really seeing where
4 we were starting from, which is a place that we
5 needed to improve upon. Let's see. Let me stop
6 real quick. I'm getting feedback that I'm not
7 sharing my screen. Can y'all see my screen?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. It's not coming
9 through. It did earlier when I gave you the ball.
10 You might want to stop sharing and then share
11 again.

12 MR. LADNER: Okay. All right. My apologies.
13 Okay. So can you see it now?

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Beautiful. Thank you.

15 MR. LADNER: Okay. All right. Leave it to
16 the last one to have the tech glitch.

17 So the point being, these were some
18 of the keys that we felt we needed and we learned
19 from, but one thing I want to impress on this group
20 is we have made an intentional focus on how we
21 structure our organization to make supplier and
22 workforce diversity a focus. Rhonda Adams, who you

1 all know, I want to commend her. She's very
2 engaged on the IUBDC. She has really led this
3 effort for us, and I'm happy to say that this year
4 we expanded her role to not only supplier diversity
5 as the lead for American Water, but also workforce
6 diversity and added a member to her team, and that
7 was very important for us to continue to move
8 forward in this area.

9 Something that I also believe is
10 critical is leadership engagement, and that starts
11 with me and Rhonda, as mentioned, she is on my
12 leadership team; she directly reports to me, and we
13 have weekly conversations as well as monthly
14 meetings with our operations and engineering leads
15 to make sure that they understand that this a first
16 principle. This is a value that we expect are made
17 throughout their entire organizations.

18 So moving to 2019. Okay. So in
19 2019, all these stats are directly out of our
20 annual report, so I won't spend a ton of time here,
21 but you can see MBE was a very large focus for us.
22 We were at 13 percent, close to 14, and you can see

1 on the bottom right, that red circle right there
2 highlights it on the bar graph. Total diverse
3 spent was up; it was 22 percent. This is 7 percent
4 above our goal. I will say that we set our own
5 goals at Illinois American Water. The parent
6 company puts forth proposed goals -- well, because
7 of our interest in this space and how much we know,
8 it is critical for Illinois American Water to raise
9 our goals above and beyond what the parent
10 provides. And you can see the multipliers on the
11 left-hand side here, 45X on MBEs spent since 2014
12 where we really made an intentional focus in this
13 area. The last thing I want to mention on this
14 slide is -- and many of my peers have talked about
15 it, not only doing diverse spent, but doing diverse
16 spent here in Illinois and the communities that we
17 serve. And over 90 percent of our veteran spent is
18 here in Illinois, over 80 percent of our WBE is
19 headquartered here, and then when you combine our
20 MBE along with our veteran and woman spent, you're
21 looking at over 55 percent headquartered here in
22 Illinois. So we're very proud of that.

1 Moving now to talk about 2020 and
2 where we're at right now. I'm going to talk about
3 COVID in a minute, but I want to begin by talking
4 about professional services, and this is something
5 where we heard direct feedback. In my prior role,
6 I worked for regulatory affairs for American Water
7 on a national basis, and Joe mentioned NARUC and
8 some of other events, and it's clear that
9 professional services, we felt, was an opportunity
10 for us. We started to get a good handle on some of
11 the core partnerships that are fundamentals of our
12 business as far as some of construction and
13 infrastructure. We felt there was opportunity and
14 we heard feedback from others to look at legal
15 stand as well as financial services. So that's
16 something that we started to look at in 2019, and
17 I'm happy to say in 2020, that we have made
18 progress there. Two of our 10 pension plan
19 managers are diverse and that accumulates to
20 approximately 11 percent of our assets. So it's a
21 material add, and we're also trying to do more
22 there. We're putting in criteria and processes

1 that are required of our investment committee so
2 that these focuses transcend individuals that are
3 in these roles are on these committees right now.
4 It's sustainable that this is a priority for us
5 going forward.

6 Now, in terms of COVID, we have been
7 very fortunate that a lot of our partners were
8 agile enough and we were able to continue with
9 projects that we had in place before the onset of
10 COVID. One benefit of COVID is because of this
11 diversity mindset that we got, because we needed a
12 whole new product line of PPE, for example, we were
13 able to seek out diverse suppliers and were able to
14 find some, particularly for masks and sanitizer,
15 both at the corporate level and here in Illinois.

16 Moving to challenges and
17 opportunities. So going forward, what are some of
18 the areas that we have seen headwinds? And I will
19 say headwinds. I will say to start with,
20 difficulty in identifying some of the minority
21 women-owned firms that do the business that we have
22 as a fundamental nature in terms of heavy civil

1 engineering, water sewer line construction and
2 pipeline supply. We are having challenges finding
3 a supply there. We continue to work for that, but
4 we have noticed recent retirements that didn't have
5 succession plans, or nobody was taking the reins,
6 so to speak, that was also diverse. So we're
7 looking for help there. And the other thing I
8 would mention is, and a lot of my predecessors on
9 the forum here today talked about kind of the
10 pipeline transitioning from subs to primes to
11 Tiers 2 to Tier 1. We, similarly, are working on
12 that development as well, and we found challenges
13 with some of those subs establishing themselves as
14 primes because of insurance bonding and to be quite
15 candid, safety performance. Not having a safety
16 plan in place and just a maturation of their
17 business, if you will. So we do believe there's
18 opportunity for chambers. You know,
19 Representative Welch mentioned the Department of
20 Commerce and Economic Development for the state,
21 and we see that as perhaps an opportunity where we
22 can fill some of these gaps to really help some of

1 these diverse partners take that jump, that step --
2 changeup to being a prime to allow more spend and a
3 greater degree of partnership.

4 And lastly, just some of the
5 accomplishments from our young program, we're very
6 excited about it. Some of these were also shown by
7 the others, but NUDC being a partner with them as
8 well as NAACP, accomplishments and a lot of our
9 veteran spent. We're very excited about that.

10 As everyone else mentioned, I look
11 forward to the question and answer session. Thank
12 you. Jeanine, I'll turn it over to you.

13 MS. ROBINSON: I appreciate it. Thank you,
14 everyone, for giving us a presentation. You all
15 have done a wonderful job with your increases and
16 your continuous increases. We will now, for sake
17 of time, open it up to our Commissioners and our
18 Chairman.

19 Do you all have any questions for any
20 of the CEOs at this time?

21 Commissioner Oliva, please go ahead.

22 COMMISSIONER OLIVA: Yes. I do have a

1 question. First of all, it's nice to see all of
2 you. Thank you so much for your reports and your
3 great work, year after year, in supplier diversity
4 and exceeding your goals. I have a question, and
5 I'm wondering your thoughts.

6 As I have done this for a couple of
7 years as chair of the NARUC supplier and worked for
8 diversity subcommittee, this is something that I'm
9 hoping can get done. I'm working with the
10 Commission, working with my colleagues, and our
11 executive director and Ms. Jeanine, and I proposed
12 it a couple weeks ago, expanding supplier diversity
13 reporting to include LGBT and disabled-owned
14 business enterprises. So I just want to know your
15 thoughts on that. I know many of you are already
16 doing that and you reported that to us when we met
17 with you. So I would just like to hear your
18 thoughts. Thank you.

19 MR. MATTHEWS: Okay. Commissioner, Charles
20 Matthews here. I'll go first. You know, one of
21 the issues that supplier diversity had to deal with
22 early on at the onset probably 15, 20 years ago was

1 the issue of certification and who qualifies as a
2 diverse entity. Having said that, you know, I'll
3 give you my personal opinion first. I certainly
4 think the two organizations you talked about
5 certainly belong in that category. I think, you
6 know, they have already been included in a lot of
7 other programs and initiatives. So I would be
8 supportive, but I would not want to be the
9 organization -- the entity responsible for who
10 designates and certifies. So we'll be back to the
11 same issue. We certainly -- I would be supportive
12 if the right certification processes were put in
13 place.

14 MR. DOMINGUEZ: Commissioner, it's Joe
15 Dominguez, and I agree with your proposed
16 recommendation. Some of the companies are doing
17 this reporting and we are as well. We also joined
18 NGLCC this year to drive the connection to this
19 community of vendors. I certainly understand
20 Charles' point from an auditing standpoint. We
21 need to be clear what we can and can't say with
22 precision, but I do think it's important that we

1 continue to report this and focus on it, I think --
2 I think, and everybody knows this, I think it's
3 another group that historically has been
4 discriminated against in terms of business
5 opportunities and vitally important for us to show
6 leadership in that area and certainly aligns with
7 our internal inclusion goals.

8 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you. Do you have any
9 more questions, Commissioner Oliva -- I'm sorry,
10 Oliva. Do any of the other Commissioners or the
11 chairman have any questions at this time?

12 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: I'm going to go ahead
13 and use my time to actually ask a question that
14 came in from a public commenter -- or it's a member
15 of the public, Dan Johnson. It's a good question.
16 And his question -- he's wondering as just this
17 conversation becomes more of a national
18 conversation and there are more and more industries
19 that are taking up this idea of increasing numbers
20 of supplier diversity and inclusion, if the CEOs
21 have -- and presidents have any idea of a
22 perspective or maybe an unexpected benefit of

1 engaging in this type of program that might be
2 helpful for other CEOs of other industries?

3 I know we're short on time, so maybe
4 if you can think of one idea or just, again,
5 something that may have been unexpected in
6 implementing these types of programs.

7 MR. LADNER: Commissioner, I'll go first since
8 I touched on some of these lessons learned. I
9 think the data. Getting -- we need accurate data
10 that is meaningful to help guide the implementation
11 of the program is something that we potentially
12 underestimated at American Water, and just using
13 the right technology to help you do that is
14 something that I think being intentional on the
15 front end, taking your time, will really help you
16 effectively and efficiently implement some material
17 change.

18 MR. DOMINGUEZ: This is Joe Dominguez. Look,
19 I think one of the big benefits is the myth busting
20 aspect of it. We, you know, a lot of us remember
21 the history of this where people said we need to do
22 diversity because it's the right thing and the

1 business imperative was lost, and we have seen a
2 lot of studies since then that the most successful
3 companies in America are the ones that have a
4 diverse and inclusive culture, which I would
5 include, you know, focusing on your business
6 relationships. These folks come in hungry for work
7 and opportunity and they value the opportunity to
8 improve themselves, and time and time again that
9 commitment, that desire, that drive results in
10 exceptional performance. I mentioned what it would
11 look like in the storm for us, I mentioned how
12 we're leveraging these relationships in COVID, and,
13 you know, I talked about the history of investments
14 at ComEd that have paved the dividends. We, I
15 think, have destroyed the myth that this weakens us
16 and prove the point that it makes us stronger
17 performers and stronger companies when we focus on
18 these things. I think that's really cool, not
19 unexpected from my perspective, but I think in the
20 heart of hearts of many, it is unexpected and
21 certainly something worthy to continue to reflect
22 upon.

1 MR. MARK: This is Richard Mark with Ameren
2 Illinois. My comment would be, you know, one of
3 the surprises that we have seen, you know, we have
4 a very -- much of our service territory is very
5 rural area, small community. I mentioned Endrizzi
6 Construction in Johnson County and Vienna,
7 Illinois. Very small communities like that. When
8 you see a business that is able to grow from 4
9 employees to 50 employees in a small county in a
10 very rural area, it makes a significant
11 difference -- economic impact on that community,
12 and it helps spur other ideas. I think we have
13 been able to see smaller companies and little
14 businesses operating in those communities saying,
15 "Hey, is there a service that I can provide and how
16 can I grow my business?" So some of these small
17 businesses that we have helped start and mentor to
18 grow, I think, you know, they demonstrate by
19 example that there's opportunity for other small
20 businesses, and I think especially in small
21 communities where everyone knows each other, you
22 can see these businesses start to develop and I

1 really see that as an opportunity to really, you
2 know, kind of rebirth some of these very small,
3 rural towns that are in very, very difficult
4 economic times right now. And entrepreneurship has
5 always been the way that communities grow by
6 businesses and small businesses hiring people from
7 the community, and I think what we're doing helps
8 that.

9 MR. MATTHEWS: Chairman, Charles Matthews
10 here. And I'm getting a little feedback. Okay. I
11 think --

12 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: I think if everyone else
13 just makes sure their line is muted, it might help.

14 MR. MATTHEWS: Yeah. I think I'm okay now. I
15 will quickly add that the biggest benefit I have
16 seen is that we have become a better company from a
17 diversity and inclusion perspective internally as a
18 result of what we have done externally. You know,
19 we thought we knew what diversity and inclusion
20 looked like before we even started this program,
21 but the more we engaged in supplier diversity, the
22 better we understood, you know, how we could be

1 better internally. So I think that's the biggest
2 benefit and the one that I have the most
3 appreciation for.

4 MELVIN: Hey, guys, it's Melvin and I wasn't
5 actually planning to say anything today. I was
6 going to sit here and listen. I don't know that
7 there's necessarily a one thing, I think --

8 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: I'm sorry. We can't
9 hear you. I'm getting an indication from the court
10 reporter that she can't really hear you.

11 MELVIN: Can you hear me?

12 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: That's better. Thank
13 you.

14 MELVIN: Yeah. So I think I would say that
15 there are a number of factors that has contributed
16 to our individual and our collective set. Joe hit
17 on one of them, and I think it's actually probably
18 the most compelling, which is the cultural factor.
19 And it's a cultural dynamic that we had contained
20 within our respective organization. It's also a
21 cultural dynamic in terms of our business partners
22 and all the different factors associated with that,

1 and to see that change and really get over a decade
2 to see the changes from -- and I have heard this
3 term used a number of times this morning, and we
4 don't use it anymore, and the term is "program."
5 Supplier diversity is not a program. It's a
6 business imperative. It's a part of our strategic
7 initiatives associated with how we execute every
8 aspect of our business. And the reason I say that
9 programs have a start and an end date, this has a
10 start date, but it will never have an end date, so
11 I no longer refer to it as a program. The other is
12 just the structural impediments that we had to
13 remove, and to see those impediments no longer in a
14 business -- example being how we structure our
15 procurement. Are we structuring it in a way that
16 makes it meaningful to diverse partners to be able
17 to be a part of our procurement process. And so
18 making those changes over the years has been
19 compelling in terms of how it has allowed diverse
20 partners to be more willing and more able to
21 respond to our procurement process and then
22 thirdly, just generally, the organizational changes

1 that have occurred as a result of our efforts. As
2 an example, it wasn't that long ago where we did
3 not have supplier diversity professionals that were
4 responsible for meeting our corporate strategy
5 around supplier diversity, and they have done a
6 remarkable job, not only at Nicor Gas, but I must
7 also say the collective efforts of all the
8 utilities respective to IUBDC and how they learn
9 from each other, grown from other -- grown with
10 each other and shared amongst ourselves in terms of
11 how we can continue to advance the mission around
12 supplier diversity, and the state has been a
13 compelling part of both the individual and the
14 collective success of all of the utilities as well,
15 and I could go on, but I'll stop.

16 MS. ROBINSON: There we go. Sorry. Thank
17 you.

18 Thank you all for this information.
19 At this point we will wrap up our first panel for
20 the sake of time. Justin, Charles, John, Joe,
21 Richard, thank you all for your time. Thank you
22 for the information and the review that you have

1 given us. It has been a pleasure working with the
2 team so far -- well, not so far, but thus far it
3 has been great working with the team. I look
4 forward to the collaborations that we have planned
5 for the future so that on both ends we can
6 continue to increase opportunities for the diverse
7 vendors.

8 We will now take a quick break, about
9 ten minutes, and we will return here at
10 approximately -- we'll say -- actually we'll come
11 back at 12:35.

12 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Jeanine, yeah. I was
13 just going to say if we can shorten it, I think I'm
14 really trying to stay on schedule.

15 MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

16 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: That's fine. That
17 should be fine.

18 MS. ROBINSON: Okay.

19 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: We'll start at 12:35.

20 MS. ROBINSON: 12:35. Thank you all.

21 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Thank you.

22 (Recess.)

1 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Jeanine, could I just --
2 before we begin, I just want to do a quick sound
3 check to make sure Commissioners are still -- we can
4 still hear them.

5 MS. ROBINSON: Okay.

6 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Commissioner Bocanegra,
7 can we just make sure we can hear you?

8 COMMISSIONER BOCANEGRA: I'm here.

9 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.
10 Commissioner Carrigan, I know you're in
11 Springfield, but let's make sure we can hear you.

12 COMMISSIONER CARRIGAN: I can hear you. Ready
13 to go.

14 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Great. And then,
15 Commissioner Oliva?

16 COMMISSIONER OLIVA: Yep. I'm here.

17 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Okay. Thanks.

18 Go ahead, Jeanine.

19 MS. ROBINSON: Okay. Great. Hi, welcome back
20 to Illinois Commerce Commission's Annual Utility
21 Supply Diversity Policy Session. We have just
22 completed our first panel which gave us a lot of

1 information of what each utility company has done,
2 what their goals are, what their challenges are and
3 how we will work together to continue to grow. Now
4 we will continue our second panel which entails a
5 discussion with a couple of industry association
6 heads, and the CEO of one of the medium-sized
7 utility companies.

8 This panel is to allow the industry,
9 ICC, other organizations, businesses and
10 stakeholders the opportunity to learn more about
11 the association -- or some of the associations that
12 are available as resources for this industry, what
13 their goals are, how can we, as leaders, be of more
14 assistance.

15 This panel will discuss their
16 organization, what supplier diversity values mean
17 for them and how it is evolving. So first, we will
18 begin with the introduction of our panel. We have
19 Charles Matthews, board president of Illinois
20 Utility Business Development Council; we have Craig
21 Blanchette, he is the CEO of Aqua Illinois -- Aqua
22 America -- excuse me; we have Nakhia Morrissette;

1 she is the central region director and counsel with
2 Solar Energy Industry Association, and we have
3 Kevin Wright; he's the president of Illinois
4 Competitive Energy and Association. Welcome and
5 thank you all for attending this today.

6 So first, we will begin by having you
7 all just tell us a bit about your association, what
8 does supplier diversity inclusion values mean and
9 how it has evolved.

10 We'll start with you, Charles.

11 MR. MATTHEWS: Okay. Jeanine, can you hear
12 me?

13 MS. ROBINSON: Yeah.

14 MR. MATTHEWS: Good. Okay. I won't consider
15 this double jeopardy going twice on both panels.
16 So, you know, we have already talked a lot -- or
17 you have heard a lot of conversation about the
18 IUBDC through the various presentations by the
19 CEOs, but the IUBDC, Illinois Utility Business
20 Diversity Council was formed in 2015, and it was
21 formed to adhere best practices as well as share
22 information in general as to how we could continue

1 to build the existing supplier diversity programs
2 that existed at the individual companies. You
3 know, fast forward -- let me just say that that
4 organization, that formation has paid dividends.
5 And I need to be clear, it was not mandated. I
6 think a lot of politicians, a lot of regulators
7 thought it would be a good idea and would like to
8 see it, but nobody mandated that we form this
9 organization. So we did, you know, early on, there
10 was a debate with the organization as to whether we
11 would be IUBDC light or IUBDC heavy. You know, I
12 will tell you, looking back, that we made a
13 decision that is a -- that represented a real solid
14 commitment to supplier diversity. And I'm not
15 going to tell you we went heavy, but we certainly
16 did not go light and it reflected a commitment. So
17 over the five years, you know, what we did, we put
18 an organization in place, we put a strategy in
19 place, we put governance in place, we created a
20 501C6 in place which was a real commitment, and
21 just as a backdrop, two of the 5 CEOs were not --
22 had been on the job for less than a year, and the

1 last thing -- and I was one of them, and the last
2 thing that I was looking for and Melvin Williams
3 would have been looking for at the time was another
4 assignment, but we met and realized that if we were
5 going to do this, it was worth a commitment to do
6 it right, so we did.

7 I'll just fast forward and say if you
8 look at the spend the first year of the combined
9 utilities, it was less than a billion dollars. So
10 it's roughly \$900 million. The 2019 report we just
11 went through, the collected dollar amount almost
12 hit \$2 billion. To go back, we did an economic
13 impact study in 2017, and the economic impact in
14 2017 was more than \$2 billion when you look at all
15 of the impact of the diverse spends that we were
16 putting into our local communities. So, you know,
17 I mentioned in the other panel, you know, all of us
18 -- all five of these utilities; Ameren, ComEd,
19 Nicor, Peoples Gas, North Shore Gas and Aqua all
20 brought to the table a culture of -- and commitment
21 to diversity. So we leveraged that. We did not
22 have to build that within the organization.

1 Everybody brought that into -- in their toolbox
2 where they showed up. So that's a little history
3 of the IUBDC and now I'll, you know, just sit back
4 and hear about some of the other organizations.

5 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

6 Nakhia, can you go next, please?

7 MS. MORRISSETTE: Can you hear me?

8 MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

9 MS. MORRISSETTE: You can?

10 MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

11 MS. MORRISSETTE: Okay. Great.

12 Well, first, thanks to the
13 Commissioners and the Commission staff for having
14 me here once again. As Jeanine stated, my name is
15 Nakhia Morrissette. I'm the central region
16 director and counsel at the Solar Energy Industries
17 Association. SEIA is the national trade
18 association for the solar industry. We represent
19 over a thousand member companies and a quarter of a
20 million employees across the nation that promote,
21 manufacture, install and support the development of
22 solar energy, and we do that by checking the needs

1 and cost of competitive solar in America, building
2 jobs and diversity, removing market barriers and
3 educating the public on the benefits of solar
4 energy. As far as what supplier diversity and
5 inclusion means to us, you know, we value diversity
6 and inclusion within our organization and the
7 promotion of these values across the industry. We
8 have and continue to envision an industry that is
9 committed to fostering a culture of inclusivity,
10 and we believe our suppliers, like our employees,
11 should reflect the communities that we serve. By
12 including and supporting diverse businesses in our
13 supply chain, we create opportunities, we promote
14 innovation, we stimulate growth and that enriches
15 the marketplace as a whole. At SEIA we assist our
16 members by developing strategies, programs and
17 tools that seek to equalize opportunities and we
18 allow for discussion and sharing best practices
19 within the industry and this is achieved through a
20 variety of different mediums, including webinars,
21 studies that help target our successes as well as
22 areas of improvement, partnerships with other

1 organizations and guides and toolkits for compliant
2 and internal implementation purposes.

3 We are continuously thinking of ways
4 to engage and inform our members concerning the
5 importance of supplier diversity and supply them
6 with tools to allow them to implement it
7 effectively and track it measurably. As an
8 example, earlier this year, we developed a supply
9 diversity guide and questionnaire template to
10 assist our members if they begin to track supplier
11 diversity, and it outlines considerations for
12 companies as they begin to implement an internal
13 process and collect data from the current and
14 future suppliers that will allow them to produce
15 data again, that is measurable, and we believe this
16 is important as admittedly, tracking supplier
17 diversity is new to many of our member companies.
18 So this is an important first step, I believe, to
19 gauge progress that needs to be made.

20 And then to answer your last
21 question, you know, how has this evolved. SEIA has
22 had diversity inclusion as a top priority for

1 several years now. It's one of our core values.
2 We recognize that the solar industry has a lot of
3 work to do, and it's not enough to say we need to
4 improve. We need to take action. And so this year
5 we have been focused on extending that vision to
6 include equity and justice. You know, despite the
7 challenges that we have encountered with a global
8 pandemic, we know that we are an industry that is
9 capable of creating tens of thousands of jobs and
10 numerous opportunities for small businesses as well
11 as entrepreneurs. So as we consider ways to
12 jumpstart our economic recovery, we're thinking
13 critically about issues related to race, justice
14 and opportunity because, you know, part of
15 rebuilding better, right, means that the solution
16 to create must also consider and meaningfully
17 include the people in the communities that will
18 have access to these opportunities.

19 With that said, we know what's best
20 for us and we must practice what we preach. So
21 SEIA most recently had created a board level
22 diversity, equity, inclusion and justice task force

1 to evaluate and to create the conditions necessary
2 to capitalize action on these issues with the hope
3 that it will trickle to our member companies. One
4 piece of that task force is exclusively dedicated
5 to supplier diversity and the aim is not only to
6 improve SEIA's use of diverse suppliers, but also
7 to empower our board, and, again, our member
8 companies to implement the same or similar
9 practices.

10 We're also considering creating a
11 diverse supplier database similar to what the IUBDC
12 has implemented and what we have seen as NARUC for
13 member companies to have access to diverse vendors
14 and also to act as a hub, really, for access to
15 diverse solar businesses to be contacted for
16 opportunities. As I said, this is a developing
17 initiative that we hope will produce positive
18 results within the industry at large. So with
19 that, I think I'll stop.

20 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you, Nakhia.

21 Kevin, can you answer the question
22 next, please?

1 MR. WRIGHT: Yes. Thank you. Can you hear
2 me?

3 MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

4 MR. WRIGHT: All right. Thanks, Jeanine.
5 It's a pleasure to be here, and thank you, Madam
6 Chair Zalewski and Commissioners Bocanegra, Oliva
7 and Kimbrel and Carrigan.

8 This is, I believe, the first
9 opportunity from the competitive supply community
10 to participate in the supplier diversity policy
11 workshop. My name is Kevin Wright. I am president
12 of the Illinois Competitive Energy Association and
13 the association represents the market leaders from
14 the alternative retail electric suppliers and
15 alternative gas supplier that provide energy supply
16 services to residential, commercial and industrial
17 customers. Our members serve -- (inaudible.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Kevin, I'm sorry. We
19 lost you. Are you there?

20 MR. WRIGHT: I am. Can you hear me?

21 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Now we can hear you.
22 You may need to go back a couple sentences.

1 Court reporter, what was the last
2 thing you heard?

3 THE COURT REPORTER: "To the customers." And
4 then "To the members we serve."

5 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: "To the customers" and
6 then "To the members we serve" was the last thing
7 that we heard. So if you could pick up from there.

8 MR. WRIGHT: Yes. On the electric side we
9 serve residential, commercial and industrial
10 customers and about 544 municipal aggregation
11 communities. On the gas side we serve customers in
12 the Peoples Gas and North Shore service territories
13 and the Nicor Gas service territories. My
14 membership shares the same commitment and culture
15 and best practices that you have heard from the
16 utility executives today and that is directed by
17 their CEOs and presidents on their organizations.
18 While we have been participating by filing our
19 reports in the last few years, we have not -- and
20 that's hopefully a good outcome of today's
21 participation in that the association, at least
22 from my perspective as its president, will actively

1 engage with the Commission and Jeanine Robinson and
2 her team in terms of the supplier diversity goals
3 and opportunities that the Illinois Competitive
4 Energy Association can encourage its member
5 companies to not only participate, but to advance
6 those goals even further. I think the opportunity
7 here for the association, as the market leaders,
8 although we are not the only association. There is
9 a national one -- the Commissioners will know of
10 the Retail Electric Supply Association. We are
11 solely Illinois focused. Whether it's regulatory
12 matters, dealing with the competitive market before
13 the Commission or legislative issues with the
14 general assembly.

15 So I think we are positioned to help
16 advance those goals and to encourage our membership
17 too and not only embrace those goals, but to
18 improve upon those goals. We think, you know, we
19 want opportunity for this invitation, and, again, I
20 thank Jeanine and the Commission for offering that
21 to us, is learning from the utilities and from the
22 Commission of the experiences, the challenges and

1 progress that has been made as a guide to us as we
2 encourage and inform our membership to do the same.

3 One thing I will point out with
4 the -- with ICEA, I-C-E-A, for Illinois Competitive
5 Energy Association is that the competitive
6 alternative retail electric suppliers and the
7 alternative gas suppliers are structurally
8 different than what we have heard and what we
9 understand and know from the utilities, and by that
10 I mean these competitive suppliers operate in
11 multiple states where there is competitive supply
12 choice or retail competition. Some are located and
13 headquartered in Illinois, some are headquartered
14 in other competitive market states that have a very
15 large presence or footprint in Illinois, some are
16 affiliated with a parent company, sometimes it may
17 very well be a generation company, some are
18 stand-alone entities that have no affiliation
19 whatsoever. So all of my member companies do have
20 corporate policies that are directed from their
21 corporate leadership. How they go about it does
22 vary from company to company. In one instance that

1 I'm aware of, one company generally operates by --
2 (inaudible.)

3 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Kevin, we lost you. If
4 you could go back. Go back, I think, just one
5 sentence. "I'm aware of one company that generally
6 operates by," that's where you dropped off.

7 MR. WRIGHT: Oh, yes. One company's corporate
8 policy is with certified diverse suppliers through
9 the federal government certification program, other
10 suppliers use the state certification requirements
11 and some use both. Along with recognizing --
12 (inaudible.)

13 THE COURT REPORTER: Lost him.

14 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Yeah. We lost you
15 again. Kevin, are you there?

16 MR. WRIGHT: Yes, I am. I'm in the basement
17 of my home, maybe that's making the difference. I
18 don't know.

19 THE COURT REPORTER: "Other suppliers who use
20 the state certification requirements, and some use
21 both along with..."

22 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: "Other suppliers who use

1 the state certification requirements, and some use
2 both."

3 MR. WRIGHT: Correct. And then still, either
4 working with state certification requirements or
5 working with diverse supplier -- (inaudible.)

6 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: We lost you again. If
7 we lost you, one thought is that you could also
8 submit your comments, and we can put it up on our
9 website. That's one solution.

10 MR. WRIGHT: Fair enough. Why don't I bring
11 my comments to a close and then be open for
12 questions, and perhaps that will work.

13 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Okay.

14 MS. ROBINSON: Yes. Thank you, Kevin.

15 Craig?

16 MR. BLANCHETTE: Thank you, Jeanine. I would
17 like to thank -- you hear me okay, I assume?
18 Everyone can hear me okay?

19 So first I would like to echo -- I
20 would like to thank the chair, Chair Zalewski, the
21 Commissioners, Jeanine, you and your team and all
22 the staff at the Commission that have been very

1 helpful with helping us advance our supplier
2 diversity efforts over here at Aqua. In the
3 essence of time and getting to questions, I will
4 spare you the description of Aqua. I think you all
5 know Aqua well and where we're at in utility space
6 in Illinois, but I will say this, you know, just
7 because we're a medium-size utility and we're under
8 the hundred thousand customer threshold for
9 reporting doesn't mean that we don't benefit from
10 all the same opportunities that the other bigger
11 utilities have with supplier diversity and I think
12 the predecessors in the previous sessions said it
13 well; you can't be a top performer -- I think
14 Richard said it; you can't be a top performer
15 without having a diverse perspective in your
16 suppliers and your organization. That's something
17 we embrace and, you know, by working with the
18 Commission and folks over at IUBDC, and we hope to
19 bring that same level of top performance to our
20 organization through diverse entities.

21 I think as a lot of the folks on the
22 call know, that one of my goals for a few years now

1 as I became president of Aqua was to, you know, to
2 voluntarily present -- to present a supplier
3 diversity report to the Commission and we did that
4 this year, and I'm really proud of the progress we
5 have made in that effort, but I would also be
6 remissed if I didn't mention what Justin, and I
7 think even Melvin said, this is not a one-time
8 thing. It's an ongoing effort, you know, year
9 after year, day after day, and that we're just the
10 very start of it, and I will admit that up front.
11 We're at the very, very start of this and trying to
12 build something here that is sustainable and into
13 the future. And so I'll kind of break with that
14 there, but I just want to reinforce today we're
15 excited to be here. This is kind of a long time
16 coming for us. It's a big day for us to actually
17 participate and present to the Commission, and I
18 really hope it's the first of very many reports
19 that I present on ongoing efforts associated with
20 supply diversity.

21 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

22 MR. MATTHEWS: Jeanine, this is Charles

1 Matthews. I did not want to steal Craig's thunder,
2 but since he didn't share that he is a member now
3 with IUBDC, he is our first associate member. He
4 came in at the beginning of this year, I believe,
5 Craig and I just wanted to go back and make sure
6 everybody knew that he came, he joined as a
7 voluntary member, associate member, and well, we're
8 just pleased to have him as part of IUBDC.

9 MS. ROBINSON: That is awesome news. Thank
10 you. Congratulations, Craig. Thank you all for
11 responding. Actually, that was one of the reasons
12 that Craig was asked to be a part of this panel to
13 reflect how he has used some of the resources that
14 have been available.

15 However, we have become very short on
16 time, so we're going to have to cut our questions
17 and answers short.

18 I have one question; however, I want
19 to check with the Commissioners and Madam Chair to
20 see if there is a question you have for any of our
21 panelists before we wrap it up.

22 (No response.)

1 MS. ROBINSON: No. Okay. So what we're going
2 to do is I have one question, and as I said, for
3 the sake of time, I'm going to ask one question and
4 I'm going to direct it to Kevin and Nakhia, which
5 is: What resources are available to help your
6 members achieve their 2020 diverse spend goals
7 during this pandemic? Kevin or Nakhia, either one.

8 MR. WRIGHT: Nakhia, go ahead.

9 MS. MORRISSETTE: Sorry. I'm trying to unmute
10 myself. Can you hear me?

11 MS. ROBINSON: Yes.

12 MS. MORRISSETTE: Okay. Well, in short, we
13 consider ourselves to be a resource to our member
14 companies. In spite of, you know, significant
15 decline that we have seen in the forecast of both
16 solar development and employment by the industry,
17 diversity, you know, still remains a priority. We
18 recognize, again, that as we rebuild, we have to
19 incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion and
20 justice into the culture of the industry and
21 certainly, this moment as we're looking to rebuild
22 the economy and companies all over the nation are

1 taking a really critical look at this issue, this
2 is a real opportunity to do that. As I stated
3 earlier, we continue to come up with resources that
4 will allow our industry to -- really to look at
5 this in a way that is measurable and quantifiable.
6 So we will continue to develop resources to do
7 that.

8 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you. Craig -- I mean
9 Kevin, sorry.

10 MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, Jeanine, you can hear
11 me now?

12 Yeah. I think in talking to my
13 member companies while each have various resources
14 they work with in their state or in this state or
15 with advocacy organizations, I found that the
16 Commission can play a very helpful role with my
17 industry by, you know, I think one thing -- the gap
18 that's missing is we don't always know who is out
19 there that we can contract with that is certified,
20 that, you know, meets all the requirements, and so
21 to the extent that the Commission can provide
22 guidance to us or guide us to those sources, and I

1 apologize if we don't know what they are, that
2 would be extremely helpful for us in meeting the
3 goals and expectations that the Commission has.

4 A couple of things I -- you know, one
5 of the success stories, which I just learned
6 yesterday, again, giving credit to the Commission,
7 one of my member companies did contract or hire a
8 minority law firm largely because they were present
9 and presented at last year's supplier diversity
10 policy session. They are not headquartered in
11 Illinois, but have a substantial footprint in
12 Illinois, and so that was a real opportunity that
13 presented itself. Things like that can be very
14 helpful to our association, and, again, I will
15 engage earnestly with the Commission and with your
16 staff, Jeanine, and with whomever else you -- that
17 is suggested as resources to improve and our
18 activity in supplier diversity procurement.

19 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Do any other
21 Commissioners have anything else?

22 (No response.)

1 CHAIRWOMAN ZALEWSKI: Okay. I have 1:05.
2 Great job at ending close to our agenda time. I
3 want to thank all the panelists for their insight
4 and for answering all of our questions, and thanks
5 for everybody's flexibility during these trying
6 times. This was our first virtual supplier
7 diversity session, hopefully our last.

8 Supporting supplier diversity
9 initiatives is a priority for the ICC. Kudos to
10 Jeanine Robinson for running a first successful
11 supplier diversity session, and a virtual one at
12 that, and if there is no other questions or
13 business to discuss, then the meeting stands
14 adjourned. Thank you.

15 MR. WRIGHT: Thank you.

16 MS. ROBINSON: Thank you, everyone. Have a
17 good one.

18 (Whereupon, the above-entitled
19 matter was adjourned.)
20
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22