

SECRETARY'S RECORD, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of the) Application No. PI-231
Commission, on its own motion,)
responding to the COVID-19)
state of emergency.) PROGRESSION ORDER #3
)
)
)
) Entered: July 28, 2020

BY THE COMMISSION:

The Nebraska Public Service Commission ("Commission") opened this docket on March 24, 2020, for the purpose of responding to the state of emergency declared in Nebraska with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. This docket encompasses each Commission department, as well as Commission operations as a whole. This docket remains open for the purposes of continuing essential Commission functions and protecting the safety and health of the Commission, its staff, and Nebraska residents.

In the interests of protecting the welfare of Nebraska residents, the Commission hereby takes the following actions, and modifies actions previously set forth in this docket, as follows:

1. Temporary Ban on Natural Gas Disconnections.

- a. The Commission hereby finds that the temporary ban on natural gas disconnections for residential customers previously issued pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 66-1805(1)(1) and 291 Neb. Admin. Code § 9-013.05, if left in place, could create additional hardships for both customers and utilities within Nebraska. The Commission notes that this ban may be preventing customers from accessing payment assistance programs that require customers to be in imminent danger of utility shutoffs, and that customers may be accumulating significant amounts of debt as a result. The Commission is particularly concerned that the timing of the cold weather rule may cause customers to carry especially large balances if the ban is not lifted as soon as possible.
- b. Therefore, the Commission finds that this ban should be rescinded, effective August 15, 2020. The Commission encourages customers who are experiencing hardships to reach out to their utility companies for assistance.

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- c. The Commission requests that the utility companies remain in contact with the Commission, and continue to provide up-to-date information regarding the status of customer accounts in arrears and the impact of COVID-19 on natural gas utilities and customers in Nebraska.

O R D E R

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the findings and actions of the Commission described above be, and hereby are, adopted.

IT IS FINALLY ORDERED that this docket shall remain open until further order of the Commission.

ENTERED AND MADE EFFECTIVE at Lincoln, Nebraska, this 28th day of July, 2020.

NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS CONCURRING:






Chair

ATTEST:


Executive Director

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D I S S E N T

By Commissioner Rhoades:

It is not necessary or in the public interest to lift the moratorium on utility shut offs at this time. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant harm to the physical and economic health of many Nebraskans. Given the crisis has not passed, and transmission of the virus is accelerating in many Nebraska counties, it would be inappropriate to lift the moratorium at this time. While there are some customers who have been unable to pay as a result of COVID-19, it is less than 5% of utility customers according to data submitted to the Commission.

Utilities provide necessary services. As a result, they have not suffered as severely as other industries in this difficult economy. Utilities are eligible for cost recovery for any losses they may experience through the rate making process. That is to say, a utility is likely to recover the full cost, or most of the cost, associated with the pandemic, even if the small portion of customers currently unable to pay are never able to pay. A utility, more than any other industry, will be in a position to rebound after the crisis has passed.

Meanwhile, those individuals who have contracted the virus or lost their job due to the crisis are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table, and to seek medical care if they become ill.

In my view, it is callous, unethical, and immoral to lift the COVID-19 utility shut off moratorium at this time. Accordingly, I dissent.


Commissioner Crystal Rhoades