

SUB ratepayers want increase in proposed utility rate rollback

By David Brown
Of the Emerald

The Springfield Utility Board began discussing a reduction in a planned 28.5 percent electricity rate hike Wednesday and set a public hearing to continue considering the matter for Oct. 26.

The reduction would cut a scheduled October residential rate hike by 10 percentage points to 18.5 percent.

The rollback proposal results from SUB's recent release from its contract to pay \$124 million for bonds funding construction of two moth-balled nuclear power plants in Washington. Because the contract created a general financing liability, the utility needed ratepayer approval to legally enter the contract, according to a ruling issued by Lane County Circuit Judge George Woodrich.

SUB contracted to pay the Washington Public Power Supply System for the bonds regardless of whether any electricity was produced by WPPSS nuclear power plants 4 and 5.

The rollback would return some of the revenue raised by those bonds.

But several Springfield residents, including Peter DeFazio, candidate for the Springfield seat on the Lane County Board of Commissioners, filed a lawsuit contesting the utility's authority to enter the contract without voter approval and added their arguments for a larger rollback.

"Springfield ratepayers owe nothing for WPPSS 4 and 5," testified a representative of Springfield Fair Share, an statewide activist organization. "But this happened not because our utility was protecting its ratepayers, but because (Springfield citizens) filed suit on behalf of our ratepayers," he said.

The board should seriously consider giving the ratepayers a rollback greater than 10 percent, DeFazio later told the board. The rate reduction only accounts for \$2 million of the \$6 million generated for this year's payments to WPPSS through budget carryovers, rate hikes, operational cutbacks and layoffs.

"Look very hard at that \$4 million," DeFazio advised.

"You know, you're not looking at the problems," replied board member Bob Adams. "I've made the statement to you before of how our accounts receivable has grown in the six months that I've been on the board. . . . As a businessman, it's scary," Adams said. SUB will need that extra revenue before the year's end, he said.

The board should also drop a lawsuit defending its authority to enter contracts such as the one with WPPSS, continued DeFazio and two other Springfield residents.

"I would urge the board to do everything they can to reinforce (Judge Woodrich's ruling) . . . to join with us" in upholding the ruling in the state Supreme Court, DeFazio said.

WPPSS is expected to appeal the Woodrich ruling in the Oregon Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the decision to roll back rates is sound, said Steve Loveland, SUB general manager.

Garry McMurry, SUB's special counsel, said the utility's customers will pay the price if the board is not successful in defending its authority to enter into contracts to purchase electricity. "What is the effect on our ability to buy power from BPA (the Bonneville Power Administration)," he asked.

McMurry also urged continuing SUB's suit charging WPPSS with default of the contract through mismanagement.

Late loans got you in a pinch?

University fund lends help to students caught short

By Frank Shaw
Of the Emerald

Is your Guaranteed Student Loan three weeks late?

Have you gone through the first two weeks of class without books because you can't afford them?

The University's short-term loan fund could be the answer to your problems.

The fund consists of about \$900,000, according to Larry Tergesen, accounting supervisor.

Last year the maximum amount a student could borrow was raised from \$150 to \$250, and the fund ran dry several times.

To be eligible for a loan, a student is required to be enrolled for at least six credit hours (five hours for graduate students), have no outstanding debts to the University and have filled out a short form in the financial aid office.

Ed Vignoul, financial aid director, sees the loan fund as a service for those who really

need it.

"It should be available to students who for some reason are in a short-term bind for money," he says.

Money ran out last year, Vignoul says, because of the increase in the maximum loan amount and the increase in the University's long-term loan program.

"We didn't anticipate students would take out the full amount of the loan," Vignoul says. "We thought they would continue to take out just what they needed, but that turned out not to be the case."

Both Vignoul and Tergesen feel the students have to decide whether they really need the full amount.

"It is an emergency loan program and it should be used for emergencies," Tergesen says.

Despite the fact that both feel the loans should be used only for emergencies, there is no checking up on the reasons a student wants a loan.

"We figure the students are

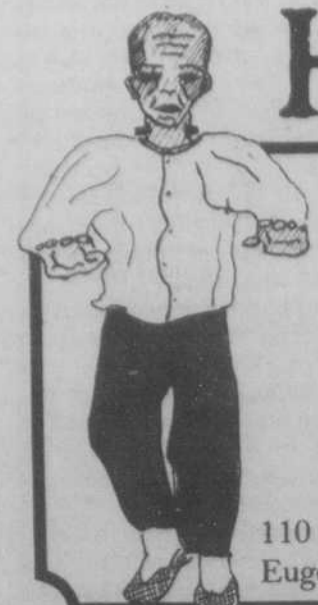
old enough to know if they need the money," Vignoul says, "and we won't question their judgment."

"For the most part a student can walk into financial aid, fill out a short form and pick up their loan the next day," Vignoul says. "That's not an option that's available many other places."

Last year the business office gave out \$1,541,088.90 in loans. So far this year Tergesen estimates they've given out \$653,000.

All the money in the loan fund comes from donations, Tergesen says. The fund is self-sustaining — as loans are paid back the money is returned to the fund.

If the fund continues to run dry Vignoul says he will propose lowering the maximum amount a student can borrow. He's happy with the amount that is currently given out because it will provide enough money for a student to buy books and pay part of their fees.



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