

OUR VIEW

Have your say about Pacific Power's proposed 14% rate hike

Thirteen dollars a month doesn't go far. It won't buy more than a couple gallons of gas. It may not buy you any baby formula, at all.

But \$13.01 is how much more an average Pacific Power's residential customer in Oregon may have to pay as of Jan. 1.

Add in increases for business and industrial customers and Pacific Power will come away with a revenue increase in the tens of millions. The Citizens Utility Board, which looks after the interests of consumers in Oregon, says it would be a \$106 million increase for Pacific Power.

Should Pacific Power get it? Or is the utility asking for too much? You can tell the Oregon Public Utility Commission what you think.

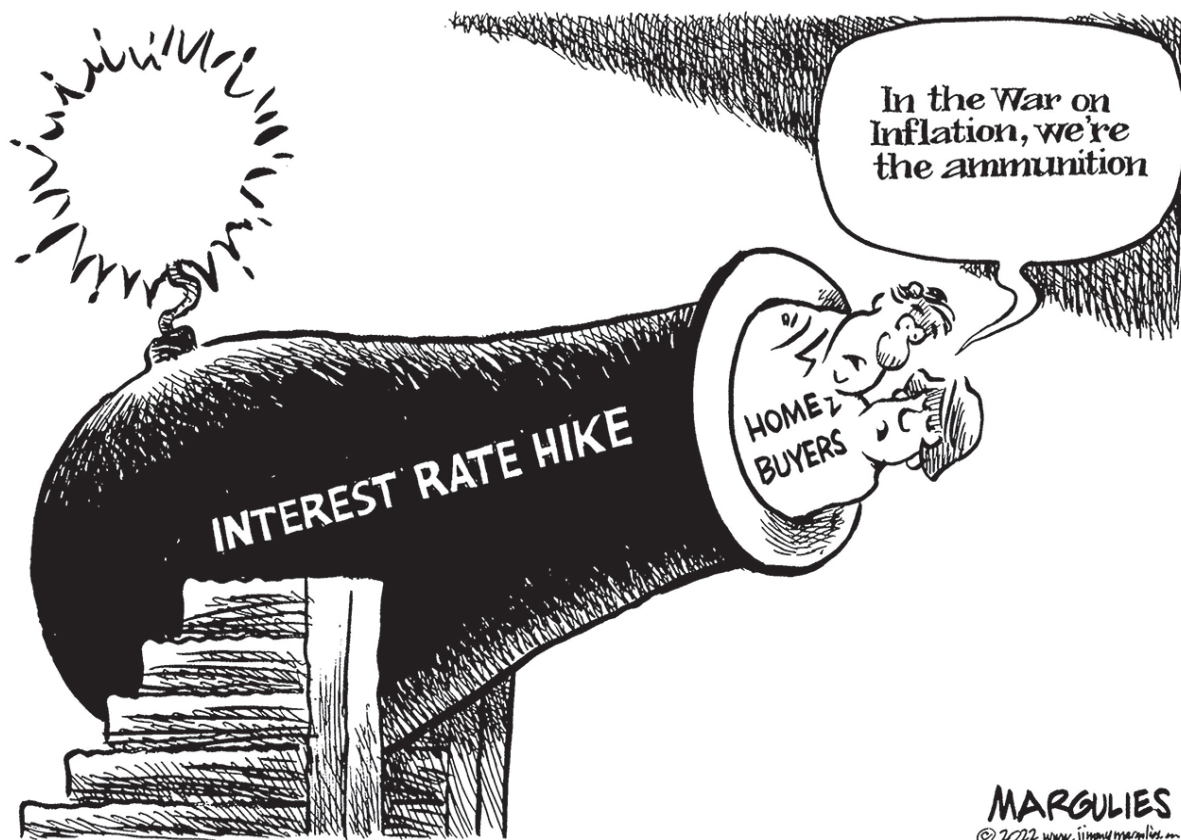
The increase for average residential customers will be about 14%. That's where the \$13.01 a month comes from. It assumes power usage of 900 kilowatt hours a month.

Pacific Power faces increasing costs. It must close coal-fired plants and transition more to renewable energy. It is spending millions to reduce the danger of wildfire from power lines. Natural gas prices are going up. Buying electricity on the market can cost more.

Pacific Power also proposes to move to seasonal rates. Electricity would be cheaper in winter and more expensive in summer. That makes sense to encourage people to use power wisely when demand will spike in the summer for air conditioning. But it's going to hit people with less money harder.

Bob Jenks, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board, told us Pacific Power also wants to alter the rules for power costs. Most businesses set a price for a product. They don't get to come back later and say: "Sorry, we were off in our projections. You need to pay more." Utilities in Oregon already get to come back later and justify rate increases, because, well, we all need utilities to provide reliable service. Pacific Power in its proposals is essentially asking to shift additional risk to customers, Jenks said.

The PUC was set to meet Tuesday, May 24, at 6 p.m. to discuss this rate proposal. There is more general information about the PUC and rate increases here: tinyurl.com/ORpucrates. You can comment on the proposed increases by emailing the PUC at PUC.PublicComments@puc.oregon.gov. You can also call 503-378-6600.



FARMER'S FATE Keeping it clean on the farm

We live on a farm. At the end of the day, we all smell like dirt — or mud and manure, as this spring hasn't quite seemed to make up its mind if there should be snow or sunshine.

This has tripled the laundry and doubled the baths — a situation my 6-year-old hasn't been thrilled about. I think he's afraid that the adventure memories might wash down the drain with the mud! It also means we have gone through more soap than normal. So when we began studying soap in chemistry class, I may have gotten a little more excited than the kids.

We read about soap throughout history — learning that Queen Elizabeth I reportedly took a bath every four weeks "whether it was necessary or not." My 6-year-old thought that she must have been a very intelligent queen.

We read about soap legends. According to the Roman tale, soap got its name from Mount Sapo, where animals were sacrificed. Rain would wash the fat from the sacrificed animals along with alkaline wooden ashes from the sacrificial fires into the Tiber River, where people found the mixture helped to clean clothes.

And finally we began reading about the chemistry of soap — saponification, during which an ester reacts with an inorganic base to produce alcohol and soap. When triglycerides react with sodium hydroxide (NaOH), it produces glycerol and fatty acid salt.

"Soap is basically a salt product that is made by combining an alkali with fats," I exclaim. The more excited I got over the chem-



Brianna Walker

ical equations, the more my kids' eyes glazed over. "What do you call someone who mixes H₂O and NaOH?" I asked. "A lyer!" I laughed. They didn't.

That's when I decided it was time we had some good, clean fun. Our kitchen counters soon looked like an herbal apothecary. Bottles of oils and tubs of fats lined the counters, along with containers holding last year's dried herbs, blossoms and berries.

We made a hyssop-shea butter blend, then an aloe-oatmeal variety. One of the goats had kidded recently, so we threw in a few batches of goatmilk soap. Coffee soap, tea soap, calendula and lilac — soon the kitchen was filled with hundreds of bars of soap in various stages of curing.

My husband teased that I was becoming addicted to making soap. What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul, so I agreed that yes, while I may have started down the slippery "soap" of addiction, I assured him I was clean now!

He rolled his eyes and asked why, with all this soap, we still had the dirtiest kids in the neighborhood?

I smirked. "They're farm kids. That isn't dirt, it's potential income."

I've heard you need two baths a day to stay really clean, one a day to be passably clean, and just one a week to avoid becoming a public menace. So to keep from menacing society — during this ter-

ribly muddy spring, we decided our kitchen science experiments weren't quite complete yet. We took out baking soda, citric acid and cornstarch.

What kind of chemical reactions would occur when sodium bicarbonate dissolves in water along with citric acid? As the baking soda dissolves, positively charged sodium breaks apart from the negatively charged bicarbonate. As the citric acid dissolves, a single hydrogen ion separates from the rest of the molecule. Very quickly the hydrogen and bicarbonate mingle and begin undergoing a series of reactions, creating carbon dioxide. Because carbon dioxide is a gas, it forms small bubbles in the water — we had just created bath bombs.

Bath bombs turned out to be just like the soap. We couldn't seem to stop with one batch. We tried substituting other ingredients while still looking for things that would make that fizzing reaction. We tried several items with moderate success, including Crystal Light packets and cream of tartar. But the best reaction came from citric acid. Quite quickly, dozens of recipes of bath bombs replaced the bars of soap that lined our counters.

The school year is wrapping up, and then our mad scientist projects will take a back burner to harvest. I don't know what kind of season we'll have or what kind of dirt we'll encounter, but I'm confident we'll have enough soap (hope) to get through it!

Brianna Walker is a Grant County resident who occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



COMMENTARY

Finding purpose inside prison walls

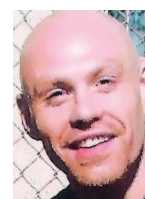
For more than 20 years now, I have been inmate No. 12729124, but my name is Eric. I am serving a 25 year-to-life sentence for second-degree murder.

On Sept. 5, 2001, I took a man's life during a fight I started while drunk, creating a ripple effect of pain and suffering that damaged countless lives. I take full responsibility for how my violence harmed others, and early in my prison sentence I made the decision to do something about it, although back then I didn't know what.

When I was arrested, I was 21 years old, staggeringly narcissistic, addicted to alcohol, marijuana and methamphetamines, lost behind the mask I used to hide my shortcomings, and profoundly undereducated. I didn't even have a GED. I acted out in ways I thought would effectively conceal my insecurities, and I pretended to be someone I am not. I was broken, and wounded people tend to hurt others. Once I honestly took responsibility for my selfishness and violence, however, I regained the power to determine my impact on the world. I may have ended up in prison, but prison is not the end of my story.

My first few years of incarceration were chaotic as I adjusted to my new reality and the fact that deep down I knew I didn't want to be in prison, but I knew I didn't want to be a man who belonged here. A few life-changing experiences led to some deep personal growth, and I learned how to make better decisions. While it took time to gain momentum, I was able to overcome the swamp of inner turmoil and the darkness of my environment.

In 2003, I earned my GED, and I began working as a tutor in the



Eric Burnham

Education Department in early 2008. I began taking college courses and earned an associate degree in 2013. I went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2015, graduating summa cum laude with a 3.98 GPA. In 2017 I completed my master's of counseling degree, and on Dec. 10, 2021, I graduated with a Ph.D. in psychology and counseling from Liberty University, the culmination of a long and demanding journey of self-discovery, personal growth, and educational achievement.

I could not have done it alone. I am so grateful for the financial assistance of my mother who completely paid for my education — every penny from the first course in my associate degree program to the final practicum of my doctoral program. Her investment in me and in my future was not only a vehicle for my transformation; it very likely saved my life. I also must extend my gratitude to the Blue Mountain Community College instructors who staff the education department at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton. I will never forget them, for they are real world life-changers.

Prison can be deeply toxic and ruthlessly oppressive, filled with hidden exploitation, normalized dehumanization, arbitrary rules and inflexible power structure that often folds resentment and rage into the personality of the incarcerated. Adversity does not adequately describe the pursuit of a college education while incarcerated; resisting the temptation

to become callous in an effort to remain physically and emotionally safe has literally changed my life. When I arrived at EOCI, I was empty and without purpose, and in my spirit I knew I offered nothing good to the world. I only consumed, never contributing much of substance or worth. I did not know how to be anything other than what I had always been, and within a few years of being here, I reached a point where I did not want to live anymore.

Yet, through my studies in psychology and philosophy, I have found not only understanding, meaning in my mistakes, and purpose in my pain, but also the insight and skills needed to use my experiences to help others. Many steps along the way have seemed insignificant and very difficult, but looking back on how far I have come, I can see how each one mattered. Today I no longer need to hide behind a mask or find refuge in a pretense of violence or in the numbness of intoxication. I can be my authentic self, allowing empathy and compassion for others to take root within my personality.

I have made so many mistakes, but through my faith in God and my education I have found the strength to keep moving forward. I can never repay all that I have taken, but I am committed to spending the rest of my life giving all I can to make the world even just a little better. My future may be shaped by my past, but it will not be defined by it.

Eric Burnham is an adult in custody at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, and has earned a doctorate in psychology and counseling while serving his sentence of 25 years to life.

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 Phone: 541-575-0710

MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

EDITOR: Bennett Hall, bhall@bmeagle.com
 REPORTER: Steven Mitchell, steven@bmeagle.com
 REPORTER: Justin Davis, jdavis@bluemountaineagle.com
 SPORTS: sports@bmeagle.com
 PAGE DESIGNER: Randy Wrighthouse, rwrighthouse@eomediagroup.com
 MARKETING REP: Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
 OFFICE ASSISTANT: Alixandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

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