



Opponents of Constellation-Exelon Merger Vocal

6/29/11 Listen at <http://wypr.org/news/opponents-constellation-exelon-merger-vocal>

“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Are we going to be their fool? No!”

About 40 people showed up in front of the Maryland Public Service Commission Building on St. Paul Place in downtown Baltimore. The protest was organized by Good Jobs Better Baltimore, a community-labor coalition.

Good Jobs Better Baltimore is against the current proposed merger between Constellation Energy and Exelon. The group says the current proposal does not protect BGE customers from rate hikes or workers from eventual job losses. Charly Carter is an organizer for Progressive Maryland. She said deregulation of the electric industry in 1999 was part of the problem.

“They promised us that if they let them do what utility companies do best, that it would increase competition, it would improve our services and it would drive prices down for customers. Have your prices gone down? No.”

Fifty-nine-year-old Alicia Champlin said she came to the protest because she’s concerned about her BGE bill. She’s semi-retired, and her monthly BGE bill is usually \$100 or more. She said she also helps her sister pay her BGE bill because she’s on supplemental security income. Champlin was not impressed with the \$100 credit BGE customers are being promised, if the merger goes through.

“They’re giving a 100 dollar credit on bills. A hundred dollars. Do you know what some of these bills are sometimes? Three, four, five hundred dollars. What is a hundred dollars going to do? Great, it takes a hundred dollars off a found hundred dollar bill. But I still have to pay a three-hundred dollar bill.”

Watching quietly in the background was Rob Gould. He’s a BGE spokesman. He hit on his key points before the protest started—in the Public Service Commission hearing room.

“Electric rates are their lowest since 2009. We’re talking about the total bill being down some 17 percent since 2009. And the commodity portion, which is the cost of electricity itself, being down nearly 25 percent in that same time period. So a lot of the concerns that have been there in the past really aren’t relevant in this instance.”

Gould said there would be no job losses at BGE for at least two years after the proposed merger. He said Exelon and Constellation are also offering five million dollars for a state program that helps low-income BGE customers. And he said the moniker of a Fortune 500 company doesn’t mean as much as it used to. He said that if the two companies are allowed to merge, some of the new company’s high-paying jobs would be based in Baltimore.

“Constellation will have a retail wholesale electric basis that will be based here in Baltimore. It’s the growth engine of the new company.”

The Maryland Public Service Commission will hold public hearings on the merger in November and December. The commission is scheduled to decide on whether a merger should be allowed in January 2012. I’m Sarah Richards reporting in Baltimore for 88-1 WYPR.