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Ex _____ (LAS-Rebuttal T) REVISED July 8, 1994

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

6 KING COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, SOLID WASTE DIVISION,

DOCKET NO. TG-940411

Complainant,

REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D

Complainant

vs.

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SEATTLE DISPOSAL COMPANY, RABANCO, LTD., d/b/a/EASTSIDE DISPOSAL AND CONTAINER HAULING

Respondent.

INTRODUCTION

Q. CAN YOU PLEASE SUMMARIZE THE MAIN TOPICS THAT YOU WILL ADDRESS IN YOUR REBUTTAL TESTIMONY?

A. In my rebuttal testimony, I will focus on six key topics.

First, that the WUTC witnesses have argued that no evidence was provided by King County witnesses to show that there are waste reduction or recycling impacts from incentive variable rates separate from the effects of other aspects of programs.

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REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 1 WUTC\Skurev.reb

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 This is not true, and several studies were provided both in direct testimony as well as in response to numerous data requests from the WUTC to support this finding. Most relevant is the "Garbage by the Pound" study which demonstrated that, if rates with stronger incentives than the existing variable can program are introduced, even with no changes in recycling or other programs, customers reduced the weight of waste set out for disposal by a statistically significant 15%. The WUTC staff has provided no studies to support its position, and argues that the WUTC should not conduct any studies as they would be "imprudent".

Second, the WUTC witnesses argue that the elasticity estimates provided by King County's witnesses are small, and should, therefore, be effectively assumed to be zero. This approach would be contrary to the WUTC's policy concerning similarly-sized elasticities for electric and telecommunications rate cases decided by the same commissioners. Although the demand elasticities are technically "inelastic", one has to take into account the magnitude of the price change, the level of demand, as well as the elasticity to determine the final effect on demand of a price change. The demand elasticities cited here are inelastic, but they are statistically distinguishable from zero, and elasticities within the same range are routinely

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24 25 incorporated into conservation policy, demand forecasting, and pricing policy for the energy and communications utilities in Washington state.

Third, the WUTC witnesses argue that, because demand is inelastic, King County should rely on "other" methods of affecting demand. However, the witnesses provide only vague theoretical possibilities for affecting demand, provide no empirical evidence that any other policies have been shown to have an effect on demand in the real world, and ask the County to dismiss the only policy instrument that has shown a statistically significant impact -- pricing. witnesses recommend that the County focus on programs to change people's tastes and preferences. Unfortunately the connection is based merely on speculation, and, as noted earlier, there is no empirical proof that such a link exists, in contrast to the numerous studies that demonstrate the significant impact of price.

Fourth, the WUTC argues that some of the estimates provided Errors were not by the County's witnesses contain errors. made, as was repeatedly pointed out in the responses to data The elasticities were properly estimated over a requests. period in which only prices changed, which is the appropriate estimation method. These estimated elasticities would be

Norm Maleng

very appropriate for estimating impacts on subscriptions during a period like the present time, when prices are the main change being made. However, as properly pointed out in the report in which the numbers were provided, when these elasticities are applied to a period when rates are not the only thing changing (for instance when new service levels and programs are introduced), the estimates will be best used incorporating judgment as to the manner in which these other factors will affect customer reactions.

Fifth, the WUTC witnesses present information of an unclear source and very limited documentation regarding the weights per can that were assumed for the rate calculations. These weights do not appear to be consistent with weights used for other WUTC rate cases, and are distinctly different from the weights measured and used by the City of Seattle, which has operated a similar variable can program with similar cans for many years. They appear inconsistent with previous rate filings to the WUTC. As a result, these weights do not appear to be stable or robust, which leads one to question the assumptions and methodology used to derive them, as well as the "cost of service" rates derived using them.

Finally, the WUTC witnesses argue that cost of service is a policy that cannot be violated and maintain appropriate

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rationing of service. Unfortunately, this ignores the fact that calculation of cost of service incorporates a significant degree of judgment as to the estimation and As the WUTC witnesses know, cost of apportionment of costs. service justification can be applied to a wide range of The direction of choices in this rate actual rate levels. case seem to have been made in one direction, with the effect of purging any incentives that could be provided, even within the moniker of justifiable "cost of service". Also, the WUTC bases cost of service solely on historical costs, unlike the practice of energy and telecommunications industries where forward-looking long range marginal cost is used. The result is to simply ignore the fact that all costs can be expected to increase in the future.

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SEPARATE IMPACTS FROM RATES

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Q. ON PAGE 14 OF HIS TESTIMONY, LINES 17-25, MR. POPOFF
INDICATED THAT NONE OF KING COUNTY'S WITNESSES ISOLATED THE
EFFECTS OF INCENTIVE-BASED VARIABLE RATES FROM OTHER ASPECTS
OF RECYCLING PROGRAMS. DO YOU AGREE WITH HIS ASSESSMENT?

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A. No. Mr. Popoff neglected to mention several directlyrelevant studies provided by King County's witnesses which

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were discussed both in direct testimony as well as in the responses to data requests. The most appropriate study is the "Garbage by the Pound" study which specifically addresses this issue. This study introduced rates with greater incentives than the mature, variable rates program in Seattle which had been in place for about eight years. The customers were required to participate and were selected to ensure coverage for customers with a range of incomes. They experienced the same recycling and other programs as other residents. We found that customers reduced their tonnage by a statistically significant amount of 15% over the run of the experiment.

The witnesses also neglected to mention that an estimated 24% of Seattle's tonnage was recycled <u>after</u> the introduction of incentive variable can rates and <u>before</u> the implementation of convenient programs.

THELASTIC DEMAND

Q. MR. POPOFF TESTIFIES THAT THE ESTIMATED DEMAND ELASTICITIES

ARE INELASTIC, AND THAT IT IS NOT WORTH USING PRICING

INCENTIVES TO AFFECT DEMAND FOR SOLID WASTE SERVICE. DO YOU

AGREE?

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The testimony argues that elasticities of -0.07 to -0.14

"show that rate level does not have much of an impact on
weight of waste landfilled". First of all, these elasticity
estimates are statistically significant, and indicate that
increasing rates have a clear negative impact on the amount
of tonnage disposed. The definition of statistically
significant is that these estimates are significantly
distinguishable from a zero impact.

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Second, these elasticity estimates are in the same range as the demand elasticities estimated for electricity and for telecommunications. Elasticities less than (in absolute terms) -.2 are common in electricity and these are not assumed to be zero because they are small, either in demand forecasts nor in rate cases presented before the WUTC. The impacts of prices on electricity demand are considered crucial underpinnings to the peak load pricing, and conservation-pricing that has long been a part of the judgement imposed on cost of service rates to better ration services from a regional, societal, and environmental In the telecommunications field, elasticities as low as -.01 to -.03 are crucial inputs to assumptions affecting universal service. Zero elasticities are not assumed in these cases, unlike the recommendation in this case.

REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 7
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Although Mr. Popoff is technically correct in stating that these elasticities are inelastic, this does not mean that they have minimal impact on waste reduction. In order to calculate the final effect on demand, one needs to take into account the magnitude of the price change and the level of demand as well. Indeed, Dr. Albert estimates that the change to the WUTC's rate would lead to an increase of 9% in waste disposal, which is not an insignificant amount.

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Further, I am unaware of cases within electricity that base rates calculations on historical costs with no adjustments for new estimations of demand or price impact. The case here appears to assume last year's costs with virtually no assumed adjustments by customers for changes in the rates. are assumed to maintain virtually the same subscription levels (the unit by which revenues are collected) and are apparently allowed no tonnage reaction (the unit by which many costs are derived). This differs from the standard policy for electricity or telecommunications cases when they are presented before the WUTC. Elasticity estimates of these levels are routinely taken into account in rate design for other utilities.

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The estimates shown on page 19 of Mr. Popoff's testimony A. No. present only the first three estimated elasticities. elasticity from one can to zero cans is not relevant because customers were not generally allowed to qualify for the zero can service in 1987. The elasticity for two cans to one is an absolute value of 1, the cutoff for calling an elasticity inelastic or elastic. Mr. Popoff only presents one more elasticity -- the one for three cans to two cans (an elasticity of -1.5). This one, as well as the two elasticities for higher can levels that both exceeded an absolute value of two, are clearly above the level considered These estimates all indicate that rate changes have elastic.

a strong impact on can subscriptions.

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"OTHER" METHODS OF AFFECTING DEMAND

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Q. MR. POPOFF REPEATEDLY MENTIONS THAT "SHIFTS IN THE DEMAND CURVE" DUE TO CHANGES IN CONSUMERS' TASTES AND PREFERENCES COULD BE BETTER AFFECTED BY EDUCATION OR OTHER PROGRAM FEATURES. DOES MR. POPOFF PROVIDE ANY EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATING THESE EFFECTS?

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In addition, Mr. Popoff recommends that the County focus its efforts on programs that have no demonstrable effect, and, unlike price, only affect demand indirectly and unreliably.

Q. IN HIS CONCLUSION, ON PAGE 31, MR. POPOFF RECOMMENDS THAT, IN ORDER TO MEET ITS WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING GOALS, KING COUNTY SHOULD "CONCENTRATE ITS RESOURCES AND EFFORTS ON WAYS TO SHIFT THE DEMAND FOR WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE IN THE COUNTY RATHER THAN ATTEMPT TO MOVE ALONG AN INELASTIC DEMAND FUNCTION". DO YOU BELIEVE THIS WOULD BE A PRUDENT POLICY FOR THE COUNTY TO FOLLOW?

A. No I do not. Mr. Popoff asks King County to dismiss the one policy instrument (pricing) that has a direct, demonstrable and statistically significant effect on demand, and rely on unspecified policies that will "shift the demand" by altering people's tastes and preferences for recycling. Mr. Popoff's speculative discussion argues that some policies will shift demand, but provides no evidence, either empirical or otherwise, that would substantiate that there are options

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REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 10

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(practical or otherwise) with demonstrated effects. Granted, Mr. Popoff's background does not emphasize solid waste, but I am unaware of any literature within the energy field (Mr. Popoff's area of specialization within the WUTC) that demonstrates a measurable impact from information-only programs, despite attempts to measure these effects. Further, information programs are expensive, and would, I believe, have a shorter lifetime than periodic pricing I do not believe reminders encouraging behavior changes. that a reliance on these types of programs alone would allow King County to reach its recycling and waste reduction goals.

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King County has shown a history of "balance", implementing information campaigns, convenient programs, and pricing to move the County toward its qoals. Mr. Popoff's suggestions would remove a key strategy from King County's arsenal in favor of unclear strategies with no proven effects.

DOESN'T MR. POPOFF PROVIDE CASE STUDIES OF TWO CITIES IN 0. WASHINGTON WITH AWARD-WINNING RECYCLING PROGRAMS BUT NO INCENTIVE-BASED VARIABLE RATES?

> Norm Maleng Prosecuting Attorney

Α. level" (page 29). 12 cities.

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Yes he does. However, the diversion rates for these cities are not provided. Nor are the criteria for presenting the award discussed. Mr. Popoff defines these communities as not having incentive rates because "none of the companies have rate differentials greater than 35% between any service In fact, these are much higher differentials than are recommended by the WUTC in association The rate differentials presented in the with this rate case. staff recommended rates in association with TG-940411 are, respectively 13%, 17%, and 24%, for increasing can sizes. These are considerably lower incentives than the "nonincentive" rate threshold defined by Mr. Popoff for these two

In my testimony I cited numerous case studies for communities in California and Washington with very high diversion levels that have incentive-based rates, and which attribute a good deal of their success to the incentives provided by rates. understand that Seattle views incentive rates as their most effective recycling program.

Finally, on this point, I wanted to note that, in my opinion, you will find that the recycling programs would tend to be more cost-effective -- and thus a more prudent expenditure of funds and more fiscally sustainable -- if they are augmented

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by incentive-based rates. Rates are also a much cheaper incentive than the "cadillac" types of programs and extensive, expensive educational efforts that are needed to achieve high diversion on their own.

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MR. POPOFF RECOMMENDS THAT, BECAUSE A VERY LARGE PRICE EFFECT Q. MIGHT BE NEEDED TO CAUSE A LARGE CHANGE IN SERVICE DEMAND, THE COUNTY SHOULD EMPHASIZE EDUCATION OR OTHER PROGRAMS. CAN YOU COMMENT ON THIS?

If we take Mr. Popoff's logic one step further, if a large Α. price effect is needed to affect demand when there is actually a demonstrated, significant price coefficient, we would need a tremendous amount of education to affect demand when there is no demonstrated coefficient presented for education's effect on demand. The County is being asked to rely on a policy instrument that has a speculative, rather than a demonstrated, effect on demand.

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WERE WRONG AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN HIGHER (E.G., PAGE 20 OF HIS TESTIMONY). CAN YOU CLARIFY?

MR. POPOFF REPEATEDLY ARGUES THAT THE ELASTICITY ESTIMATES

A. Although clarified in the data requests, Mr. Popoff does not appear to understand the information presented. The elasticity estimates being referred to here are the estimates of the reaction of customer "can" subscription levels in reaction to changing rates for those cans.

As Mr. Popoff points out in his lengthy discussion of basic economics, elasticities reflect the effects of price changes The elasticities presented in my testimony were on demand. estimated in a period in which rates were the main thing that This is an especially appropriate time to estimate changed. These elasticities would then price elasticities. appropriately provide estimates of the effect of changes in rate levels -- in the absence of changes in other major factors -- on subscriptions. Price elasticities were calculated and presented in Exhibit (LAS-6). estimates are not incorrect, and in fact, were estimated in an appropriate time period and under suitable circumstances for price elasticities.

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My original document Exhibit (LAS-6) then reports that Seattle experienced a rate change during a period in which two other major factors came into play -- a new subscription level was introduced, and new programs were introduced. noted that strict application of the estimated elasticities (which were estimated to take into account only price effects) without using judgment to estimate the complicating effects of new service levels and programs, would not be appropriate. And the discussion that follows in the text in Exhibit (LAS-6) illustrates the point. In fact, the resulting changes taking into account all three factors (prices, new can size, and programs) were different than the estimated price effect alone. This does not make the estimates wrong, just incomplete tools for measuring the They are highly appropriate, impacts of multiple effects. however, for providing estimates of the effects of changes in rates where rates are the main thing being changed -- for instance, the current case.

The results show highly elastic changes in customer subscription levels in response to changes in price absent any other effects.

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RATES WERE PROVIDED.

from one can.

Exhibit (LCD-4).

to the Meeks work.

"comparison" was provided.

THE WEIGHTS FOR EACH OF THE CAN SIZES USED FOR ESTIMATING THE

The weight levels were apparently provided from a variety of

sources. Page 10 of Layne C. Demas's testimony mentions

weighed, but apportioned based on route tonnage totals and

apparently estimated based on fixed percentage differentials

is mentioned, and discusses actually weighing cans. However,

mentions "comparing" the actual weights from the 1990 study

basis is unclear, but may be the Meeks work, presented as

the can weights are not presented. The discussion also

from Eastside's cost of service study, also includes can

weights. The basis for these weights is not made clear.

Based on the columns in the table presented in Exhibit

monthly "calculations" of weights, where cans are not

distributions of cans based on the route.

CAN YOU COMMENT ON THESE WEIGHTS?

The documentation on the one-can differential

No discussion on the method for

In addition, a 1990 study by Eastside

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REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 16

(LAS-9), the comparison between the Meeks weights and the 1990 study must have led to some concerns about the

The weights are

Norm Maleng

Exhibit (LCD-3), presented as

methodology for one study or the other, because the differentials between the Meeks work (Column 6, Exhibit ____, (LCD-4)) and the figures used in this rate case (Column 4, from Exhibit ____ (LCD-1)) are dramatically different, both in level and in differentials. However, based on the response to data requests, it appears that the WUTC staff does not have a copy of the actual 1990 study, and did not review the actual 1990 study or its methodology.

Without the numbers from the 1990 study, it is difficult to make a judgment as to the validity of the approach for determining the can weights, which were then used as an integral part of the cost of service determination. However, if Meeks was ever used, the numbers in this study do not appear consistent with the weights used in previous rate filings with the WUTC. No discussion or information was provided on the source or justification of these differences, which are the most important single determinant of the calculated cost of service differentials in the proposed and recommended rates.

A more reliable set of weights, based on actual customer data are contained in the work that I have conducted in association with the "Garbage by the Pound" (GBTP) study.

This study provided a weekly weighing of 1,500 cans both

before and after the pilot program. A comparison of the weights derived in the GBTP study, the assumed rates for Eastside's recommended (and adopted) rates, the assumed weights submitted by Eastside Disposal, and the Meeks weights is contained in Exhibit (LAS-9). The average can weights before the pilot, but after several years of an incentivebased variable can system and convenient recycling and yard waste programs, are presented in Column 2 of Exhibit After the additional rate incentives from pound-(LAS-9). based rates, the numbers in Column 3 resulted, Exhibit The weights in this experiment are based on weekly, in-field measurements, and should be fairly similar to the types of programs and effects King County customers have been experiencing. The City of Seattle assumes weights in this range when it calculates its rates. The Demas testimony and the Meeks numbers are presented in Columns 4 and 6, respectively, Exhibit (LAS-9).

Please refer to Confidential Exhibit (LAS-10) for this paragraph of testimony.

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The basis for the work deriving these weights was not clearly documented, and because it is an important underpinning to the cost of service basis, its lack of consistency may call into question the "cost of service" basis for the recommended rates. In our testimony we noted that the cost of service nature of the rates could not be justified on a volume basis under any of a wide array of assumptions.

COST OF SERVICE

Q. THE WUTC WITNESSES ARGUE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO DEVIATE FROM COST OF SERVICE AS A BASIS FOR RATES OR IT LEADS TO INEFFICIENT RATIONING OF SERVICE. THE WITNESSES MAINTAIN THAT THE RECOMMENDED RATES REPRESENT COST OF SERVICE. CAN YOU COMMENT ON THIS

A. I believe that both the proposed and the recommended (subsequently adopted) rates were portrayed as representing cost of service. This just goes to illustrate the point that there is no one set of numbers that represents cost of service. Rather, there is a great deal of estimation, apportioning, and judgment that goes into determining the total revenue requirements, as well as deriving the proper beneficiaries of those costs. Therefore, depending on where

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REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 19

in the range each of the cascading assumptions is made, "cost of service" can be used to properly justify a wide range of actual rate levels. The assumptions that were made in this case seem to have been made to result in minimizing the differentials between service levels, whether or not similarly reliable assumptions could have been made that would have resulted in rates that provided greater incentives. For example, differences in assumptions made about the weight of cans on the street would, for one, lead to significant differences in cost of service calculations.

My understanding is that the WUTC generally does not believe in applying a cost of service model as a mathematical model without incorporating judgment and policy. In this case, "cost of service" appears to be portrayed to the Commissioners as one number when, in fact, based on my experience, I believe an equally justifiable number could be calculated that would result in greater incentives for customers. This alternative set of rates could provide King County with a continuing foundation on which to build to meet its waste reduction and recycling goals. This set of recommended rates represent an apparently abrupt change in policy and structure from the previous rates.

Norm Maleng

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I believe that the underpinnings of rates must be cost of Α. However, I also understand that cost of service is service. a concept that allows significant room for judgment and incorporation of policy choices in rate design. I have seen rates for solid waste that have very aggressive differentials (100% differentials or even higher than the resulting "a can is a can") in order to lead to strong incentives for recycling and waste reduction. I have also seen rates with zero and very small differentials, with the incumbent small effect on customer waste management choices. Neither of these probably represents the best approach to providing signals for rational use of solid waste services.

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Based on my training and experience, long run marginal cost (LRMC) pricing, incorporating appropriate environmental and societal costs into pricing policy, seems to make the most long-term sense. However, applying LRMC in a shorter term time frame is complicated because: 1) current disposal and other costs may not be reflecting long term costs, and 2)

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marginal cost pricing does not lead to a precise calculation of revenue requirements. Adjustments must be made in the "level" of rates in order to incorporate marginal cost pricing. I believe rates that incorporate cost of service as well as incentive policy are the most appropriate mix. Using some of the balance between conservation and cost of service pricing principles that were applied to the electricity industry may provide a model for appropriate policy in solid waste. Properly applied, these approaches can provide signals, recover needed revenues, and represent socially responsible policy.

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In addition, I believe that the spirit of the Waste Not Washington Act is to look at cost of service, but to incorporate policy and judgment to assist in providing clear long run price signals to customers to take care in their waste management decisions. If cost of service, non-incentive rates policy is interpreted as minimizing the differentials between cans to assure revenue recovery, I do not believe it represents either the flavor of the legislation, nor does it provide a basis for a rational solid waste environment.

O. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR REBUTTAL TESTIMONY?

A. Yes.

REVISED REBUTTAL TESTIMONY OF LISA A. SKUMATZ, Ph.D. - 22