Docket No. UG-200112 - Vol. III WUTC v. Puget Sound Energy July 15, 2020



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Page 70	Page 72
BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION	1 APPEARANCES (Cont.)
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND) DOCKET NO. UG-200112 TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,)	WITNESS PANEL:
Complainant,) vs.)	WILLIAM EINSTEIN, for PSE 4 SUSAN FREE, for PSE ELIZABETH O'CONNELL, for Staff
PUGET SOUND ENERGY, Respondent.) TELEPHONIC SETTLEMENT HEARING, VOLUME III Pages 70-110 CHAIR DANNER, COMMISSIONERS RENDAHL AND BALASBAS, JUDGE HOWARD AND JUDGE PEARSON July 15, 2020 9:30 a.m. Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission 621 Woodland Square Loop Southeast Lacey, Washington 98503 REPORTED BY: TAYLER GARLINGHOUSE, CCR 3358 Buell Realtime Reporting, LLC 1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 1840 Seattle, Washington 98101 (206) 287-9066 Seattle (360) 534-9066 Olympia (800) 846-6989 National www.buellrealtime.com	5 STEPHANIE CHASE, for Public Counsel * * * * * * 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
Page 71 A P P E A R A N C E S COMMISSIONERS: DAVE DANNER, Chair ANN RENDAHL, Commissioner JAY BALASBAS, Commissioner ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES: MICHAEL HOWARD RAYNE PEARSON FOR COMMISSION STAFF: JEFF ROBERSON Assistant Attorney General Office of the Attorney General Office of the Attorney General Office of the Attorney General ASSISTANT AND ASSIST	Page 73 1 EXAMINATION INDEX 2 STEPHANIE CHASE PAGE 3 By Ms. Paisner
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1 (Pages 70 to 73)

Page 74 Page 76 1 1 LACEY, WASHINGTON; JULY 15, 2020 JUDGE HOWARD: Next, I'd like to ask if the 2 2 9:30 A.M. parties intend to give an opening statement in support 3 3 --000-of the settlement? PROCEEDINGS 4 MR. ROBERSON: Yes, I will be delivering 4 5 5 opening remarks on behalf of the parties with JUDGE HOWARD: Let's be on the record. 6 6 potentially some supplementation by both PSE and Public 7 7 Today is Wednesday, July 15th, 2020, at 9:30 a.m. We're Counsel. 8 here today for a settlement hearing in Docket UG-200112, 8 JUDGE HOWARD: All right. Mr. Roberson, if 9 which is captioned Washington Utilities and 9 you'd like to begin, feel free to go ahead. 10 10 Transportation Commission versus Puget Sound Energy. MR. ROBERSON: Good morning, Chairman 11 My name is Michael Howard. I am an 11 Danner, Commissioner Rendahl, Commissioner Balasbas, 12 administrative law judge with the Commission. I'm 12 Judge Pearson, and Judge Howard. As Judge Howard has joined today by Administrative Law Judge Rayne Pearson, already noted, in front of the Commission this morning 13 13 Chair Dave Danner, Commissioner Ann Rendahl, and 14 14 is a settlement to resolve all issues in Docket 15 Commissioner Jay Balasbas. UG-200112, which concerns PSE's application to 15 16 Let's start by taking short form appearances 16 discontinue its rental service and sell that leasing 17 beginning with the Company. Could we have an appearance 17 service to Grand HVAC Leasing. 18 for PSE? 18 This settlement is in some sense years in 19 MR. STEELE: Good morning, Your Honor and 19 the making. As Mr. Einstein notes in his prefiled 20 Commissioners. My name is David Steele, with Perkins 20 testimony, both PSE and its corporate predecessors have Coie, on behalf of Puget Sound Energy. And with me is 21 21 offered leasing services for decades. As Mr. Einstein 22 my colleague, Sheree Carson, also with Perkins Coie, for 22 also notes, those services have long been contentious. 23 23 PSE. In 1971, a challenge to one of those programs reached 24 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you, Mr. Steele. 24 the State Supreme Court and as recently as 2016, this 25 Could we have an appearance for Staff? 25 Commission held a full adjudication concerning potential Page 75 Page 77 1 MR. ROBERSON: Good morning, Judge Howard. 1 expansion of PSE's leasing program. 2 My name is Jeff Roberson. I'm an assistant attorney 2 In its final order resolving PSE's 2017 3 general representing Commission Staff. 3 general rate case, the Commission approved a settlement 4 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 4 that required the parties to engage in discussions about 5 5 And could we have an appearance for Public the future of the leasing program. The parties held those discussions, and afterwards, PSE determined that 6 Counsel? 6 7 MS. PAISNER: Yes, this is Ann Paisner. I'm 7 the way forward was to sell the leasing program. 8 8 Mr. Einstein's testimony details the process PSE went the assistant attorney general for the Public Counsel Unit in the Washington State Office of the Attorney 9 9 through to generate buyers and how to select 10 General. 10 [inaudible]. This settlement is effectively the 11 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 11 culmination of that process. 12 On the issue of the evidence and exhibits 12 The settlement before the Commission does 13 that have been submitted so far, are the parties willing 13 four main things. It authorizes PSE to sell the leasing to stipulate to the admission of the prefiled exhibits 14 14 program to GHL, it provides for detailed communications 15 and testimony in this docket? 15 between PSE and its customers. Those communications MR. ROBERSON: Staff will stipulate to the 16 16 will provide information helpful to customers in order 17 admission of those exhibits. 17 to make an informed decision about whether to continue 18 MR. STEELE: Same for PSE. 18 leasing through GHL, including the cost of purchasing 19 MS. PAISNER: And also for Public Counsel. 19 the water heating from PSE, payment plan options, 20 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 20 comparison of PSE and GHL's leasing terms, and 21 Then all prefiled testimony and exhibits are 21 information about customer obligations if they decide to 22 admitted, and I'll provide a copy of the exhibit list to 22 purchase their water heater. 23 the court reporter so it can be made part of the record. 23 The third thing this settlement does is 24 (All prefiled exhibits and testimony 24 provide for an additional payment plan option for 25 25 admitted.) customers who wish to terminate their participation in

2 (Pages 74 to 77)

Page 78

the leasing program and purchase their water heater. That payment plan option allows customers to spread the cost of the water heater over a 12-month period without accruing interest.

And finally, this settlement preserves all parties' abilities to make argument about the proper treatment or gains and losses from the sale when PSE files for final treatment of those gains or losses.

WAC 40-07-740 governs the Commission's review of the settlement. Under that provision, the Commission will approve the settlement if its terms comply with applicable law and adoption of the settlement is in the public interest.

The parties before you urge the Commission -- or urge the Commission to approve the settlement as consistent with both of those requirements. With regard to the first requirement, which concerns the consistency of applicable laws, the parties submit that the settlement complies with public service laws and all other relevant laws. For example, the settlement gives effect to WAC -- or -- or sorry, RCW 80.12.020's requirement that PSE obtain an order authorizing a sale of any property necessary or useful to its public duties before completing the sale.

With regard to the second prong, which is

Are there any questions for Mr. Roberson before we give the other parties an opportunity to supplement the opening remarks if they wish?

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Not from me, thank you.

CHAIR DANNER: No for me. Let's hear from the others.

JUDGE HOWARD: Would PSE or Public Counsel like to add to the opening remarks?

MR. STEELE: Your Honor, PSE has just a few comments to add on. PSE agrees with the comments made by Mr. Roberson and supports the settlement in this proceeding in its whole. Over the last year or so, PSE has worked extremely hard to close the water heater rental service in a manner that maximizes customer choice and minimizes the disruption to customers.

PSE's application and the settlement in this proceeding achieved these objectives. The settlement in this proceeding was a highly collaborative and cooperative process aimed where it should be, ensuring customers fully understand the sale and transition process to GHL. Indeed, nearly all of the changes agreed to in the settlement focus on improving and enhancing the customer transition process.

As set forth in the application and

Page 79

the public service prong, or the public interest prong, the settlement is in the public interest for at least three reasons. First, the settlement authorizes PSE to sell the leasing program to GHL, a provider that has made guarantees offering customers great stability and which is also committed to guarantees concerning -- concerning service law.

Second, the detailed communication between PSE and its customers will provide customers with the information that they need to make a fully informed choice about whether or not to terminate their participation in the leasing program or whether to continue leasing.

And third, the settlement expands customers, including low income customers, payment plan options, which should make it easier for customers who wish to purchase their water heater, make it easier for them to do so.

Given that the settlement complies with the criteria for approval under WAC 40-07-740, the parties request the Commission approve it without condition.

If the Commission has no questions for me, I'll yield the floor to Mr. Steele and Ms. Paisner in case they have other thoughts.

JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you, Mr. Roberson.

Page 81

Page 80

supporting testimony, PSE strongly believes that selling the service to GHL is in the best interest of PSE and its customers and it's consistent with the public interest.

Before the Commission today on behalf of PSE is William Einstein, PSE's director of product development and growth, and Susan Free, PSE's director of revenue requirement and regulatory compliance. Both are available for questions. Their qualifications are included with their prefiled direct testimony.

Again, PSE fully supports the settlement and asks that the Commission approve the settlement today without condition. Thank you.

JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you, Mr. Steele. Would -- are there any questions for

Mr. Steele?

Hearing none, would the Public Counsel like to make any remarks at this time?

MS. PAISNER: I just want to make a couple remarks. Public Counsel is -- also agrees with the statements made by Mr. Roberson and supports the settlement in full that was filed on May 22nd, 2020. Public Counsel sees this settlement agreement as focussing on providing and clarifying information

3 (Pages 78 to 81)

Page 82 Page 84 1 regarding options to customers during the sale 1 witnesses and set forth their qualifications on the 2 2 transition period. And as I just stated, we support the record. Puget Sound Energy has done this in the 3 3 settlement in full. petition filed earlier in this docket. 4 4 I do at some point, because we did not So let's begin with allowing Public Counsel 5 5 submit testimony on the record in writing, I do want to a brief opportunity to set forth their witness's 6 make sure that I have the opportunity to introduce my 6 qualifications. 7 7 witness and her -- so that she can provide her MS. PAISNER: Thank you, Judge Howard. This 8 qualifications on the record. 8 is Ann Paisner. 9 9 JUDGE HOWARD: Certainly, Ms. Paisner. 10 10 We'll -- we'll give both Staff and Public Counsel the EXAMINATION 11 opportunity to introduce their witnesses. 11 BY MS. PAISNER: 12 Any questions for Public Counsel? Okay. 12 Q. Ms. Chase, please state your name for the record and spell your last name. 13 Hearing none, let's move on to calling the witnesses. 13 14 Because this is a virtual hearing, let's have -- first 14 A. My name is Stephanie Chase. My last name is 15 have the witnesses identify themselves and the party 15 spelled C-h-a-s-e. 16 they're appearing for beginning with the witness -- the 16 Q. Thank you. 17 two witnesses for Puget Sound Energy. Then I will swear 17 And by whom are you employed? 18 in the witnesses at the same time and we will hear 18 A. I am employed by the Public Counsel Unit of the 19 testimony from the witnesses together as a panel. 19 Washington State Attorney General's Office as a 20 20 regulatory analyst. And also I ask that the witnesses turn on 21 21 Q. Thank you. the -- their video while they are -- they are 22 22 What is your occupation? testifying, and the party representatives can 23 23 temporarily turn off their video feeds. A. I'm a regulatory analyst with the Public Counsel 24 So can we have introductions from the PSE 24 Unit. 25 witnesses? 25 Q. And on whose behalf are you testifying? Page 83 Page 85 1 MR. EINSTEIN: Good morning. This is Will 1 A. I am testifying today on behalf of the Public Einstein. I'm the director of product development and 2 Counsel Unit. 2 3 growth for Puget Sound Energy. 3 Q. Thank you. 4 4 Please describe your education. MS. FREE: Good morning. This is Susan 5 5 Free. I am the director of revenue requirements and A. I have a JD from the University of Wisconsin Law 6 regulatory compliance for PSE. 6 School and a master's in public affairs from the La 7 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 7 Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of 8 8 Wisconsin-Madison. I also have a bachelor's degree in And could we have the witness for Staff? political science from South Dakota State University in 9 MS. O'CONNELL: Good morning. This is 9 10 Elizabeth O'Connell, regulatory analyst from Staff. 10 Brookings, South Dakota. JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 11 Q. Thank you. 11 12 And could have the witness for Public 12 Please describe your experience. 13 13 A. Prior to joining Public Counsel, I worked as an Counsel? 14 associate attorney with the Environmental Law and Policy 14 MS. CHASE: Good morning. My name is Stephanie Chase, and I'm regulatory analyst with the 15 Center in the Madison, Wisconsin office. I -- as an 15 16 Public Counsel Unit of the Washington State Office of associate attorney, I worked on a variety of legal and 16 17 17 the Attorney General. policy matters related to energy and environmental 18 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 18 issues in Wisconsin, North Dakota, and South Dakota. My 19 I will swear in each of you here at the same 19 work representing -- at ELPC, my work included 20 time. Please stand and raise your right hand. 20 representing the organization along with senior 21 (Witness panel sworn.) 21 attorneys in general utility rate cases and transmission 22 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. You may be 22 siting cases in front of the Wisconsin Public Service 23 23 Commission. And prior to that, I have also worked as a seated. 24 24 And as -- as we noted, Public Counsel and research assistant on consumer and financial product 25 25 Staff have requested an opportunity to introduce their protection for Michael Collins at the University of

4 (Pages 82 to 85)

Page 86 Page 88 Q. Could you please provide an overview of your 1 Wisconsin-Madison. 1 2 2 educational background? Since joining Public Counsel in January of this 3 3 year, I have worked on a variety of energy and A. Yes, I have a Bachelor's in science -- of 4 transportation matters. I was the analyst in the Super 4 Science in economics specializing in banks and finance 5 Friends moving company complaint and the -- the 5 from the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas, 6 Washington Movers Help Restitution. I'm also currently 6 Venezuela. I also have a Master's of Business 7 7 working on the natural -- Cascade Natural Gas general Administration in international oil and gas management 8 rate case as well as the Clean Energy Transformation Act 8 for -- from the University of Dundee in the United 9 rulemaking dockets and the AMI rulemaking docket. 9 Kingdom. I -- in 2016, I graduated from the University 10 10 I also represent Public Counsel on PSE's of Washington in Seattle with an accounting diploma. 11 Conservation Resource Advisory Group as well as the 11 Q. Could you describe any training you've received 12 12 technical group for the IRP and for PacifiCorp's DSM low to help you carry out your duties as a regulatory 13 analyst? 13 income advisory groups and then their IRP group as well. And I also completed the Public Utilities Reports 14 14 A. Yes, I -- I participated in the regulatory 15 15 Principles of Public Utility Operations and Management training from the University of New Mexico in 2016 among 16 guide course in May of 2020. 16 other trainings in various areas of the regulatory -- in 17 Q. Thank you, Ms. Chase. 17 regulatory aspects. 18 Does Public Counsel support the settlement that 18 Q. And have you testified before the Commission 19 was filed on May 22nd, 2020, in this docket? 19 previously? 20 20 A. Yeah, I've testified in multiple general rate A. Yes, Public Counsel does support the settlement 21 21 cases in -- but most notably and most relevant for this agreement because as PSE has decided to sell the water 22 22 case, I provided testimony related to the leases -heater rental program, it's -- it's in the public 23 23 interest to wrap up the program in a way that informs leasing case from PSE Docket UE-151871 and UG-151872 in 24 customers and enables them to make the best choice for 24 2016. And I was also the Staff witness for the general 25 their situation and for a number of the consumer 25 rate case 17 -- UE-170033, UG-170032 addressing the Page 87 Page 89 1 protections that have been enumerated by Mr. Roberson, 1 rental program. 2 2 MR. ROBERSON: And at this point, I would Mr. Steele, and by you. 3 3 like to make Ms. O'Connell available for questions from MS. PAISNER: Thank you. I have no further 4 4 questions. the Bench. JUDGE HOWARD: Would Staff like to introduce 5 5 JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 6 their witness? 6 At this point, we'll open up to questions 7 MR. ROBERSON: Thank you, Judge Howard. 7 from the Commissioners. 8 8 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Good morning. This EXAMINATION is -- this is Commissioner Rendahl, and I have a few 9 9 10 BY MR. ROBERSON: 10 questions for both PSE and the other parties. 11 Q. Ms. O'Connell, would you state your full name 11 So, Mr. Weinstein -- Mr. Einstein, you 12 and spell your last name for the record? 12 called in to the public comment hearing, correct? 13 13 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, that is correct. A. Yes, my name is Elizabeth O'Connell. My last name is spelled O, apostrophe, C-o-n-n-e-l-l. COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Okay. So you heard 14 14 15 Q. Who is your employer? 15 the concerns that a number of the customers raised at 16 A. I am employed by the Washington Utilities and 16 the public comment hearing. Do you believe that the 17 Transportation Commission. 17 settlement terms and the actions outlined in the Q. What position do you hold at the Commission? 18 18 customer transition plan including the additional 19 A. I'm a regulatory analyst in the energy 19 documents provided in response to the bench request will 20 regulation section of the regulatory services division. 20 address all of these concerns the customers raised? 21 Q. What are your duties as a regulatory analyst? 21 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, I do believe they will 22 A. I'm on various duties. I'm responsible for 22 address the concerns the customers raised on that -- at

5 (Pages 86 to 89)

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: And what in

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that particular hearing.

particular do you think will -- will provide

financial and accounting analysis, auditing records of

other reviews for compliance purposes.

regulated companies, rate design, cost of service, among

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Page 90

customers -- will reduce their concerns about the change, a new entity, and whether that entity is going to be financially secure and provide the customer service that they're used to experiencing with PSE and PSE's contractors?

MR. EINSTEIN: So I would say that the -- can you hear me? I'm hearing a bit of an echo, so I just want to make sure.

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: I'm hearing you. It's probably my -- I will reduce my sound.

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{MR}}.$ EINSTEIN: Okay. No, that's fine. Thank you.

At the public hearing that was held on May 18th -- on June 18th, excuse me, was the beginning of the process to approve the request to -- by the Company to sell the business. It wasn't the beginning of the process that the Company is going through to work with GHL to transition customers and provide them with the choices that we believe they need to have in order to decide how they want to participate in a program going forward.

As you saw in the documents that we filed as part of the bench request, we have a very extensive customer transition and communication plan that has been agreed to with GHL and is actually part of the asset

with Staff. I -- I agree with what Mr. Einstein just described. I think the settlement provides a lot of terms and a lot of resources that customers can use for making sure they feel comfortable with this transition. Their -- I truly believe that this is the best vehicle for PSE to terminate or phase out their program.

Page 92

Page 93

The settlement as- -- the settlement provides not only for customers -- conditions for customers to stay with their leasing program, but also conditions in ways that they can move out of the program or buy out their contract if they truly feel uncomfortable with this transition.

Also, the quality of service, I think it's pretty much the -- the company GHL has committed to maintain the level of quality of service, and from the evidence that was submitted in the record, I believe that we have seen enough that the Company is capable to provide that kind of quality of service. And on top of that, we recently -- the Company submitted their response to bench request stating that the Company just -- GHL just partnered with PSE's service provider, I believe it's called Fast, that they use for their current rental program.

So I think there are a lot of aspects of the settlement that provide for an easy transition to make

Page 91

purchase agreement that they -- that each party signed as part of that, so it's an attachment to that agreement, which binds them to participating in that customer transition plan.

In addition with GHL, we believe we picked a very strong service provider as part of this who is going to be able to provide our customers today with the best possible service going forward. GHL is a company that has excessive experience in providing rental equipment options in the HVAC area for customers. They have extensive experience working with other utilities around North America, and we believe that they're going to offer the best possible service package to other -- to our customers that we could -- if it wasn't going to be offered by PSE.

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you. For the other parties, so for Ms. O'Connell and also for Ms. Chase, a similar question. In light of the issues -- and I'm assuming both of you called in to the public comment hearing. In light of the issues that the public commentors raised, many of them were quite concerned about this change given what they were used to. Are you still comfortable with the settlement and PSE's sale of the water heater program to GHL?

MS. O'CONNELL: This is Elizabeth O'Connell

customers as comfortable as they can, as -- as -- as we can, or as the settlement can to make this transition as smooth as possible for them.

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you. Ms. Chase.

MS. CHASE: Yeah, I would agree with
Ms. O'Connell and Mr. Einstein's comments. We do
support the settlement because of those additional
consumer protections. If the settlement is approved by
the Commission, customers will be receiving tailored
letters depending on if they have any remaining
undepreciated balance. They'll receive information
about payment plans, and if they -- if they have a fully
depreciated piece of equipment, they will receive a
letter that tells them that specifically, that they
don't have to pay anything to take ownership of their
water heater, but, of course, they could choose to
transition.

And -- and we -- we think that -- that the settlement provides enough information for customers and a -- and a long period of time, several communications, and then is also going to be followed up by a phone call from PSE from -- from PSE to any customers who haven't responded. So PSE will be reaching out to them to actively respond to any concerns that they have.

6 (Pages 90 to 93)

Page 94

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you very much.

That concludes my -- my initial questioning, so I turn it over to my colleagues if they have other questions.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: Yes, good morning. This is Commissioner Balasbas. I have a couple of questions for Mr. Einstein and then one question for Ms. O'Connell and Ms. Chase.

But I will start with you. Good morning, Mr. Einstein.

MR. EINSTEIN: Good morning, Commissioner.
COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: So was one of the reservations for PSE wanting to -- or concluding that it should sell the water heater program was because it was currently closed to new customers and has been closed for some time?

MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, that is true. There are several regulatory restrictions, I guess, on the existing program and the -- the program is -- for the last eight to ten years had a declining participation base.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: If the Company were allowed to add new customers to the -- to the program, would PSE be interested in continuing to provide the service?

take -- you know, if a new owner of the house takes possession of that house at the time of a real estate transaction they choose not to -- to lease at that time, then they -- they cease participation in the program.

There are from time to time, you know, complaints about specific issues as there is with any, you know, retail services type of program, but I believe the Company has addressed this over time in an excellent fashion.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. And then my -- my last question for you, Mr. Einstein, is, in reading the asset purchase and sale agreement, I believe it's under the provisions of Article 9 for termination, if the Commission were to -- were to reject the sale of the program to GHL, would PSE be on the hook for either like a termination fee or break-up fee or would they have to pay something to GHL for the sale not going through?

MR. EINSTEIN: I don't believe we would have to do that, but I would have to review the -- that specific provision again to ensure that I'm correct in that. But I don't believe we have a break-up fee.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. Judge Howard, if PSE is not able to answer that question here before the conclusion of the hearing, I would like to

Page 95

MR. EINSTEIN: I think we'd have to go back and evaluate the manner in which the program would operate if we were allowed to add new customers to the program. As you may be aware, we previously asked to expand this type of a program and as well as add additional equipment to it, and that request was previously denied by the Commission.

So I think if something were to change in the area of the restrictions we would be able to provide, we would have to go back and reevaluate our -- the -- the future scenario and determine what the best course of action was.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: And as Commissioner Rendahl mentioned, we heard a lot at the public comment hearing from current customers of the program who had generally expressed satisfaction with the program. Are you aware of recently of any customer complaints about the program or any unhappiness from customers about the services that PSE is providing?

MR. EINSTEIN: In general, we believe that customers are happy with the service they provide. That's why they are still customers who are part of the program. However, as I -- as I previously indicated, you know, there are customers who choose to end their service with the program. Usually this occurs when they

Page 97

Page 96

have that responded to in a bench request.

JUDGE HOWARD: Certainly, Commissioner. I will make a note.

COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. Thank you.

And then a question for Ms. O'Connell and Ms. Chase. So I'm -- I'm curious as to why Staff and Public Counsel have opposed, have in the past, and I would presume maybe continue to oppose, new customers in the water heater program.

MS. O'CONNELL: Good morning, Commissioner. This is Elizabeth O'Connell with Staff. The reason -- the main reason why Staff has opposed this program for so long is because of the way that it's laid out. Essentially, customers have a water heater that depreciates over time, and customers continue to pay rates that are not corresponding to the underlying value of their asset of their water heater. If we were to try to fix the rates at a cost of service level, we would find customers that are essentially paying close to nothing because their water heater is fully depreciated, and then we would have customers that would pay higher rates because of their -- their equipment is newer or the installation cost was much more expensive.

So the Commission has a statutory obligation

7 (Pages 94 to 97)

Page 98 Page 100 1 1 the system, so that's the information you have before to create or to -- to make sure that rates are just, 2 2 fair, reasonable, and sufficient, and having those 3 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. So -- so you -- you disparities within the same rate class don't provide for 3 haven't taken on new customers since 2000? 4 that -- for that -- for those principles to be hold 4 5 true. So it's -- it's really the way the program works 5 MR. EINSTEIN: No, no customers and/or what 6 that it's not suitable for -- for -- to be handled as a 6 I would call new water heaters because that's basically 7 7 regulated business. the point of nexus. 8 COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: Thank you. 8 CHAIR DANNER: Right, right. 9 9 And, Ms. Chase? So if we approve this sale, of course GHL is 10 MS. CHASE: Yes, and Public Counsel agrees 10 not subject to Commission regulation. Has there been 11 with Ms. O'Connell's and Staff's analysis. 11 any communication with the customers about what their 12 Historically, we have not supported expanding the water 12 avenues of -- of redress would be if, in fact, the 13 heater program because of the difference in cost over 13 company does not provide service to their satisfaction? 14 time both between renting and just an outright purchase 14 I mean, in the past, they can call us, we can -- we can 15 of the program. So I would -- I would -- I would think deal with those kinds of disputes, what are we telling 15 16 that that would be our continued analysis in the future. 16 them going forward? 17 COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. Thank 17 MR. EINSTEIN: Well, we haven't started the 18 18 communication with customers yet on this. We will wait you. 19 MR. EINSTEIN: Commissioner Balasbas, I just 19 until after should the Commission approve this. But the 20 20 customers would have the same options to file a consumer reviewed, I think you were mentioning Article 9 of the 21 21 asset purchase agreement. I am -- unless my attorneys complaint with the Attorney General's Office as they 22 tell me differently, I'm not seeing anything that 22 would of any other business that was providing service 23 23 constitutes a break-up fee or anything as part of the to them. So, you know, if they feel that the business 24 provisions of that. 24 is not meeting the terms or -- or of its -- of its 25 COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. Thank 25 agreement, they could file those complaints with the Page 99 Page 101 1 Attorney General's Office. 1 you, Mr. Einstein. 2 That -- that satisfactorily answers my 2 CHAIR DANNER: And thank you. 3 3 And right now, I'm -- I'm assuming that the question, Judge Howard. 4 participants receive their monthly bill from Puget and 4 And at this time, that concludes my initial the leasing program is part of that overall utility 5 questions, and I will yield it back to my other 5 6 colleagues. 6 bill: is that correct? 7 CHAIR DANNER: All right. Good morning. Is 7 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, that is correct. 8 8 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. Have you had it my turn, Judge Howard? 9 JUDGE HOWARD: Yes, Chair. Thank you. 9 discussions about the frequency of billing going 10 CHAIR DANNER: Well, first of all, 10 forward? I assume that the billing will now be handled 11 Mr. Einstein, I had a question. It looks like you do 11 by GHL directly; is that correct? 12 have a number of customers when you -- when you broke it 12 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, billing will be handled 13 13 by GHL directly and it will occur on a monthly basis. down for us that have been on the program for less than GHL has a whole process by which -- as is outlined in 14 seven years insofar as it's been closed to new customers 14 15 15 since 2000. Can you explain that? Is that just home the customer transition agreement, by which they will 16 16 sales or -- or what -- what is -- what is the reason for enroll those customers and then set up billing 17 that? 17 arrangement, payment arrangements for those customers. 18 MR. EINSTEIN: Yeah, it is predominantly 18 CHAIR DANNER: Okay. So yeah, those are --19 home sales and/or on the commercial side. If a new 19 those are my questions. My colleagues I think pretty 20 business opens a space and -- and the existing 20 much asked the questions that I had hoped to get to. So 21 commercial water heater is used for that business, then 21 I -- I feel we've got -- that's all the information I 22 22 we enter a new customer into the customer information 23 system. But the -- the -- because the agreement follows 23 I guess I would like to -- with regard to my 24 24 questions about communications with regard to service the premise when customers move in or move out to either 25 25 and the -- the billing, I'd like to ask if Ms. O'Connell commercial or residential to become a new customer in

8 (Pages 98 to 101)

Page 102

to add

or -- or Ms. Chase have anything to add. (Simultaneous talking.)

MS. O'CONNELL: Thank you, Chairman. I -- I support -- let me take that back. Staff supports the -- the proposal from the Company and from the transition plan in terms of the communication and the adequacy of the level of communication that the Company intends to salvage with customers. And -- and they've -- they've proposed several -- several aspects that the -- that those letters and those communications are going to include so customers feel comfortable and know all -- or have all the information to feel empowered to take action in whichever way they feel is best for them. So I think we -- we -- we feel very comfortable with the terms and -- and -- and the information that is going to be included in those communications.

CHAIR DANNER: All right. Ms. Chase?
MS. CHASE: We -- Public Counsel also feels
very comfortable with the transition letters, with the
language that's used, with the fact that they will be
tailored to the customers to their specific information,
and -- and we think that that, along with the other
information that will be included such as the -- the
full term sheet and kind of the comparison chart, we
think that will be really helpful for customers to

the transition will go to or what assurances they've been given from GHL, and we're comfortable with -- with what we have seen.

CHAIR DANNER: Thank you.

Mr. Einstein?

MR. EINSTEIN: As Ms. Chase just articulated, you know, we will be working during the transition timeframe. There's a 120-day timeframe as part of this in which we will be communicating with customers, and then there is a joint website that GHL and PSE will be putting up that will allow customers to enroll online that they can also contact GHL's customer care facilities and speak to folks to enroll over the phone.

And so there's an elaborate process that goes through that 120-day period of time, and then after that, GHL will also be communicating with and supporting customers as they make the transition prior to the final close of the transaction.

CHAIR DANNER: Okay. So for those customers who simply don't respond to your initial notices, will you be reaching out to them personally or I mean, how do you -- how do you go -- is there a default if they simply --

MR. EINSTEIN: Well, as -- as we articulated

Page 103

understand really the full choice that they -- that they can make and that they will have enough time to kind of consider their options and -- and contact PSE with any questions.

CHAIR DANNER: Okay. Well, for those of you who heard or were attending the public comment hearing, you heard that obviously there are a number of -- of customers, several of whom I believe were senior citizens, they are not comfortable with having a lot of interaction or what they consider to be complicated decision-making.

You know, so -- you know, just do you feel, Ms. Chase, that -- that the company is -- the acquiring company is going to be able to do the kind of hand-holding that may be required to make those customers comfortable?

MS. CHASE: Chair Danner, I have not had any personal interactions with GHL, but I think during -- my understanding is during the transition period to GHL, PSE is going to be helping aid that transition. And GHL I believe has offered a few different ways that customers may set up their bill payment program and to try and make this as -- as seamless for them as possible. But maybe Mr. Einstein might be able to speak more specifically to the measures between -- about how

Page 105

Page 104

as part of the settlement, there will be a final phone call made to all customers who haven't responded prior to the end of the 120-day period of time, and then all nonresponse customers will be transitioned over to GHL and GHL will then work for 60 days to try and contact those customers to set up the appropriate billing for them and to enroll them.

CHAIR DANNER: Okay. And then for those that you simply can't reach, how does -- how -- how do you plan to deal with them or how does GHL plan to deal with them?

MR. EINSTEIN: They -- they will -- they -- their lease with PSE will end and their lease with GHL will not be enrolled. And then if they choose at some point in time to take service, i.e., something happens with their water heater, something like that and they reach out to GHL saying, you know, hey, I remember hearing about this and they contact either PSE or GHL, they will be able to enroll with GHL at that point to take service from them.

CHAIR DANNER: All right. Thank you for those clarifications, everyone.

That concludes my questions, Judge.

JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you.

Do we have any further questions from the

9 (Pages 102 to 105)

Page 106 Page 108 1 Commissioners? 1 mention of Fast as the local service provider. You 2 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: I have -- I have one 2 know, as to how GHL chooses to market that to customers, 3 additional question. This is Commissioner Rendahl, and 3 we'd have to discuss that with them. this is to Mr. Wein- -- Mr. Einstein. Sorry, I'm having 4 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Okay. I was just 4 5 5 issues with your name this morning. thinking it might provide some additional comfort to 6 So in the bench request responses, and also 6 customers in making their decision. 7 7 Ms. O'Connell mentioned that -- that the PSE, the case MR. EINSTEIN: Yes. 8 that GHL recently partnered with Fast Water Heater to 8 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: So it's just a 9 9 service the water heater rental customers in Washington, question about going forward in the transition because 10 and this is the same company that PSE's used for water 10 this is all about making the customers comfortable with 11 heater service under its program. So can you tell us a 11 this transition because most of the customers don't seem 12 bit about PSE's experience with Fast Water Heater 12 to be comfortable with change. 13 service quality and -- and arrangements providing 13 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, no, I definitely service to customers and -- under PSE's water heater 14 14 understand that. I think the -- the -- you know, the minor tension point is just making sure we don't confuse 15 program? 15 16 MR. EINSTEIN: Yes, PSE has been using Fast 16 customers as to who they're actually going to be taking 17 water heating service as a vendor for the last several 17 service from as GHL is the -- is the owner of the 18 years. They have an A-plus rating on the -- on the 18 business and the service provider. But certainly we'll 19 consumer side with their business bureau. It is --19 take that into consideration as a suggestion from you. 20 20 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you. they've been a good service provider for PSE, and they 21 provide in effect all of the replacement and significant 21 And I have no further questions. water heater work on behalf of the Company with its JUDGE HOWARD: Thank you. 22 22 23 23 customers. And we were very pleased when we had heard Any further questions from the 24 that GHL had chosen to engage Fast as their service 24 Commissioners? 25 provider here locally because we believe that that would 25 Hearing none, I'd like to thank the panel of Page 107 Page 109 1 1 provide the most seamless service to customers in the witnesses. We appreciate your testimony today, your 2 2 transition. participation. 3 3 Obviously that was GHL's choice to make, and Is there any -- anything further we should 4 4 we facilitated some introductions between the parties, address before we adjourn? Hearing nothing, that 5 concludes the settlement hearing today and we are off 5 but, you know, we are -- as I said, we are very pleased 6 that they chose to engage them because we believe that 6 the record. Thank you. 7 this would provide the best possible transition, 7 (Adjourned at 10:17 a.m.) 8 8 especially for those customers you heard from at the 9 public hearing who were saying they appreciated the 9 10 service they got from PSE. We strongly believe that 10 11 this arrangement, the selection of GHL, their retention 11 12 of Fast is going to provide our customers with the best 12 13 13 possible proxy for the service that we currently provide 14 today while not being a -- any longer a PSE-provided 14 15 service. 15 16 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: And is that 16 17 information going to be provided to customers in the 17 18 letters? I'm not sure it's currently included because 18 19 it wasn't part of the discussion during the settlement 19 20 negotiations and the -- the revised letters, but is that 20 21 something that GHL and PSE will include to customers in 21 22 the letters about their choices for going forward? 22 23 MR. EINSTEIN: Well, their choice going 23 24 24 forward is going to take service from GHL. We will --25 25 you know, we're happy to talk to GHL about including the

10 (Pages 106 to 109)

	Page 110	
1	CERTIFICATE	
2		
3	STATE OF WASHINGTON	
4 5	COUNTY OF THURSTON	
6	I, Tayler Garlinghouse, a Certified Shorthand	
7	Reporter in and for the State of Washington, do hereby	
8	certify that the foregoing transcript is true and	
9	accurate to the best of my knowledge, skill and ability.	
10 11	мотор	
12	In the Contingues.	
13	Taylor Garlinghouse, CCR 3338	
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11 (Page 110)

		l	l	I
A	agreement 73:11	areas 88:16	102:4	bureau 106:19
A-plus 106:18	81:24 86:21 91:1	argument 78:6	background 88:2	business 73:13 88:6
a.m 70:16 74:2,7	91:3 96:12 98:21	arrangement	balance 93:12	90:16 98:7 99:20
109:7	99:23 100:25	101:17 107:11	Balasbas 70:13	99:21 100:22,23
abilities 78:6	101:15	arrangements	71:4 74:15 76:11	106:19 108:18
ability 110:9	agrees 80:11 81:21	101:17 106:13	94:5,6,12,22	buy 92:11
able 91:7 95:9	98:10	Article 96:13 98:20	95:13 96:10,23	buyers 77:9
96:24 103:14,24	ahead 76:9	articulated 104:7	97:4 98:8,17,19	
105:19	aid 103:20	104:25	98:25	<u> </u>
accounting 87:23	aimed 80:20	as- 92:7	banks 88:4	C 71:1 72:1 74:4
88:10	allow 104:11	asked 95:4 101:20	base 94:21	110:1,1
accruing 78:4	allowed 94:23 95:3	asks 81:13	basically 100:6	C-h-a-s-e 84:15
accurate 110:9	allowing 84:4	aspects 88:17 92:24	basis 101:13	C-o-n-n-e-l-l 87:14
achieved 80:18	allows 78:2	102:9	beginning 74:17	call 93:22 100:6,14
acquiring 103:13	America 91:12	asset 73:11 90:25	82:16 90:14,16	105:2
Act 86:8	AMI 86:9	96:12 97:18 98:21	behalf 74:21 76:5	called 89:12 91:19
action 95:12 102:13	analysis 87:23	assistant 71:11,16	81:5 84:25 85:1	92:22
actions 89:17	98:11,16	75:2,8 85:24	106:22	calling 82:13
actively 93:25	analyst 83:10,15	associate 85:14,16	believe 89:16,21	capable 92:17
add 80:9,11 94:23	84:20,23 86:4	assume 101:10	90:19 91:5,12	captioned 74:9
95:3,5 102:1	87:19,21 88:13	assuming 91:19	92:5,16,22 95:20	Caracas 88:5
addition 91:5	and/or 99:19 100:5	101:3	96:7,12,19,22	care 104:13
additional 77:24	Ann 71:3,16 74:14	assurances 104:1	103:8,21 106:25	carry 88:12
89:18 93:8 95:6	75:7 84:8	attachment 91:2	107:6,10	Carson 74:22
106:3 108:5	ann.paisner@atg	attending 103:6	believes 81:1	Cascade 86:7
address 89:20,22	71:19	attorney 71:11,11	Bellevue 71:23	case 77:3 79:24
109:4	answer 96:24	71:16,17 75:2,8,9	bench 89:4,19	86:8 88:22,23,25
addressed 96:8	answers 99:2	83:17 84:19 85:14	90:23 92:20 97:1	106:7
addressing 88:25	apostrophe 87:14	85:16 100:21	106:6	cases 85:21,22
adequacy 102:6	appearance 74:17	101:1	best 81:2 86:24	88:21
adjourn 109:4	74:25 75:5	attorneys 85:21	91:8,13 92:5	CCR 70:20 110:13
Adjourned 109:7	appearances 74:16	98:21	95:11 102:13	cease 96:4
adjudication 76:25	appearing 82:16	auditing 87:23	107:7,12 110:9	Center 85:15
Administration	applicable 78:12,18	authorizes 77:13	bill 101:4,6 103:22	Central 88:5
88:7	application 76:15	79:3	billing 101:9,10,12	certainly 82:9 97:2
administrative	80:17,25	authorizing 78:23	101:16,25 105:6	108:18
71:6 74:12,13	appreciate 109:1	available 81:9 89:3	binds 91:3	Certified 110:6
admission 73:8	appreciated 107:9	Avenue 70:22	bit 90:7 106:12	certify 110:8
75:14,17	appropriate 105:6	71:17	Box 71:12	Chair 70:13 71:3
admitted 75:22,25	approval 79:20	avenues 100:12	break-up 96:16,22	74:14 80:6 99:7,9
adoption 78:12	approve 78:11,15	aware 95:4,17	98:23	99:10 100:3,8
advisory 86:11,13	79:21 81:13 90:15	B	brief 84:5	101:2,8,18 102:17
affairs 85:6,7	100:9,19	bachelor's 85:8	broke 99:12	103:5,17 104:4,20 105:8,21
agree 92:1 93:6	approved 77:3 93:9	88:3	Brookings 85:10	Chairman 76:10
agreed 80:23 90:25	area 91:10 95:9	back 95:1,10 99:5	Buell 70:21	102:3
		vack 93.1,10 99.3		102.3

				: age ::=
challenge 76:23	comment 89:12,16	92:20 94:22 96:8	86:25 93:9 100:20	90:3,24 91:4
change 90:2 91:22	91:20 95:14 103:6	100:13 102:5,7	106:19	95:17 99:22,22,25
95:8 108:12	commentors 91:21	103:13,14 106:10	Cont 72:1	101:15 104:12
changes 80:22	comments 80:11,11	106:22	contact 103:3	customers 77:15,16
chart 102:24	93:7	comparison 77:20	104:12 105:5,18	77:25 78:2 79:5,9
Chase 72:5 73:2	commercial 99:19	102:24	contentious 76:22	79:9,14,15,16
83:14,15 84:12,14	99:21,25	Complainant 70:5	continue 77:17	80:16,21 81:3
86:17 91:18 93:5	Commission 70:2,4	complaint 86:5	79:13 97:9,16	82:1 86:24 89:15
93:6 94:8 97:7	70:18 71:9 74:10	100:21	continued 98:16	89:20,22 90:1,18
98:9,10 102:1,17	74:12 75:3 76:13	complaints 95:17	continuing 94:24	91:7,10,14 92:3,8
102:18 103:13,17	76:25 77:3,12	96:6 100:25	contract 92:11	92:9 93:1,10,20
104:6	78:11,15,15 79:21	completed 86:14	contractors 90:5	93:23 94:15,23
choice 79:11 80:16	79:22 81:5,13	completing 78:24	cooperative 80:20	95:3,15,18,21,22
86:24 103:1 107:3	85:23 87:17,18	compliance 81:8	copy 75:22	95:24 97:9,15,16
107:23	88:18 93:10 95:7	83:6 87:25	corporate 76:20	97:20,22 99:12,14
choices 90:19	96:14 97:25	complicated 103:10	correct 89:12,13	99:24 100:4,5,11
107:22	100:10,19	complies 78:19	96:21 101:6,7,11	100:18,20 101:16
choose 93:17 95:24	Commission's 78:9	79:19	corresponding	101:17 102:8,11
96:3 105:14	Commissioner 71:3	comply 78:12	97:17	102:21,25 103:8
chooses 108:2	71:4 74:14,15	concerned 91:22	cost 77:18 78:3	103:16,22 104:10
chose 107:6	76:11,11 80:4	concerning 76:25	87:24 97:19,24	104:11,18,20
chosen 106:24	89:8,9,14,24 90:9	79:6,7	98:13	105:2,4,6 106:9
citizens 103:9	91:16 93:4 94:1,5	concerns 76:15	Counsel 71:15 72:5	106:14,23 107:1,8
clarifications	94:6,11,12,22	78:18 89:15,20,22	75:6,8,19 76:7	107:12,17,21
105:22	95:13,13 96:10,23	90:1 93:25	80:8 81:18,21,24	108:2,6,10,11,16
clarifying 81:25	97:2,4,11 98:8,17	concludes 94:2	82:10,12 83:13,16	
class 98:3	98:19,25 106:2,3	99:4 105:23 109:5	83:24 84:4,18,23	$\frac{\mathbf{D}}{\mathbf{D}}$
Clean 86:8	107:16 108:4,8,20	concluding 94:13	85:2,13 86:2,10	D 74:4
close 80:14 97:20	Commissioners	conclusion 96:25	86:18,20 97:8	Dakota 85:9,10,18
104:19	70:13 71:2 74:20	condition 79:21	98:10 102:18	85:18
closed 94:15,15	89:7 106:1 108:24	81:14	COUNTY 110:4	Danner 70:13 71:3
99:14	committed 79:6	conditions 92:8,10	couple 81:20 94:6	74:14 76:11 80:6
Coie 71:22 74:21	92:14	Confidential 73:9	course 86:16 93:17	99:7,10 100:3,8
74:22	communicating	73:12,15	95:12 100:9	101:2,8,18 102:17
collaborative 80:19	104:9,17	confuse 108:15	court 75:23 76:24	103:5,17 104:4,20
colleague 74:22	communication	Conservation	create 98:1	105:8,21
colleagues 94:3	79:8 90:24 100:11	86:11	criteria 79:20	Dave 71:3 74:14
99:6 101:19	100:18 102:6,7	consider 103:3,10	culmination 77:11	David 71:21 74:20
Collins 85:25	communications	consideration	curious 97:7	days 105:5
comfort 108:5	77:14,15 93:21	108:19	current 92:23	de 88:5
comfortable 91:23	101:24 102:10,16	consistency 78:18	95:15	deal 100:15 105:10
92:4 93:1 102:11	companies 87:24	consistent 78:16	currently 86:6	105:10
102:14,19 103:9	company 74:17	81:3	94:15 107:13,18	decades 76:21
103:16 104:2	86:5 90:15,17	constitutes 98:23	customer 77:21	decide 77:21 90:20
108:10,12	91:8 92:14,17,19	consumer 85:24	80:15,24 89:18	decided 86:21
				decision 77:17

				1 490 110
108:6	documents 89:19	empowered 102:12	experience 85:12	focus 80:23
decision-making	90:22	enables 86:24	91:9,11 106:12	focussing 81:25
103:11	DSM 86:12		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	folks 104:13
· ·		energy 70:7 71:20	experiencing 90:4	
declining 94:20	dsteele@perkins	74:10,21 82:17	explain 99:15	Follette 85:7
default 104:23	71:24	83:3 84:2 85:17	expressed 95:16	followed 93:22
definitely 108:13	Dundee 88:8	86:3,8 87:19	extensive 90:23	follows 99:23
degree 85:8	duties 78:24 87:21	engage 77:4 106:24	91:11	foregoing 110:8
delivering 76:4	87:22 88:12	107:6	extremely 80:14	form 74:16
denied 95:7	<u> </u>	enhancing 80:24	F	forth 80:25 84:1,5
depending 93:11		enroll 101:16		forward 77:7 90:21
depreciated 93:14	E 71:1,1 72:1,1	104:12,13 105:7	F 110:1	91:8 100:16
97:21	74:4,4 84:10 87:9	105:19	facilitated 107:4	101:10 107:22,24
depreciates 97:16	110:1,1	enrolled 105:14	facilities 104:13	108:9
describe 85:4,12	earlier 84:3	ensure 96:21	fact 100:12 102:20	four 77:13
88:11	easier 79:16,17	ensuring 80:20	fair 98:2	Fourth 70:22
described 92:2	easy 92:25	enter 99:22	far 75:13	free 72:4 76:9 81:7
design 87:24	echo 90:7	entity 90:2,2	fashion 96:9	83:4,5
detailed 77:14 79:8	economics 88:4	enumerated 87:1	Fast 92:22 106:8,12	frequency 101:9
details 77:8	education 85:4	environmental	106:16,24 107:12	Friends 86:5
determine 95:11	educational 88:2	85:14,17	108:1	front 76:13 85:22
determined 77:6	effect 78:21 106:21	equipment 91:10	fee 96:16,16,22	full 76:25 81:23
development 81:7	effectively 77:10	93:14 95:6 97:23	98:23	82:3 87:11 102:24
83:2	eight 94:20	especially 107:8	feeds 82:23	103:1
difference 98:13	Einstein 72:3 76:19	essentially 97:15,20	feel 76:9 92:4,11	fully 79:10 80:21
different 103:21	76:21 81:6 83:1,2	estate 96:2	100:23 101:21	81:12 93:13 97:21
differently 98:22	89:11,13,21 90:6	evaluate 95:2	102:11,12,13,14	further 87:3 105:25
diploma 88:10	90:11 92:1 94:7	evidence 75:12	103:12	108:21,23 109:3
direct 73:9,15	94:10,11,17 95:1	92:16	feels 102:18	future 77:5 95:11
81:10	95:20 96:11,19	EXAMINATION	Fifth 71:17	98:16
directly 101:11,13	98:19 99:1,11,18	73:1	file 100:20,25	
director 81:6,7	100:5,17 101:7,12	example 78:20	filed 81:23 84:3	G
83:2,5	103:24 104:5,6,25	excellent 96:8	86:19 90:22	$\overline{\mathbf{G}}$ 74:4
discontinue 76:16	105:12 106:4,16	excessive 91:9	files 78:8	gains 78:7,8
discuss 108:3	107:23 108:7,13	excuse 90:14	final 77:2 78:8	Garlinghouse
discussion 107:19	Einstein's 77:8	Executed 73:11	104:18 105:1	70:20 110:6,13
discussions 77:4,6	93:7	exhibit 73:7 75:22	finally 78:5	gas 86:7 88:7
101:9	either 96:15 99:24	exhibits 73:8 75:12	finance 88:4	general 71:11,11,16
disparities 98:3	105:18		financial 85:24	71:17 75:3,8,10
	elaborate 104:15	75:14,17,21,24	87:23	77:3 83:17 85:21
disputes 100:15	Elizabeth 72:4 73:4	existing 94:19	financially 90:3	86:7 88:20,24
disruption 80:16	83:10 87:13 91:25	99:20	find 97:20	95:20
division 87:20	97:12	expand 95:5	fine 90:11	General's 84:19
docket 70:4 74:8	ELPC 85:19	expanding 98:12	first 78:17 79:3	100:21 101:1
75:15 76:14 84:3	employed 84:17,18	expands 79:14	82:14 99:10	generally 95:16
86:9,19 88:23	87:16	expansion 77:1	62.14 99.10 fix 97:19	generate 77:9
dockets 86:9	employer 87:15	expensive 97:24	floor 79:23	GHL 77:14,18 79:4
	employer 67.13		11001 19.23	GIIL / / . 14,10 / 9.4
•				

80:22 81:2 90:18 90:25 91:5,8,24 hand-holding 103:15 house 96:1,2 Howard 70:13 71:7 interaction 103:10 interactions 103:18 interac	3 :12,12 :17 :08:2,14 :10:9
92:14,21 96:15,17 100:9 101:11,13 101:10,12 handled 98:6 75:11,20 76:1,8 75:11,20 76:1,8 76:12,12 79:25 86:23 107:5,25 10 103:20 104:2,10 104:17 105:4,5,10 106:8,24 107:11 106:8,24 107:11 107:21,24,25 108:2,17 handled 98:6 74:6,11,24 75:1,4 75:1,4 75:1,4 75:1,4 75:1,20 76:1,8 75:11,20 76:1,8 75:11,20 76:1,8 75:11,20 76:1,8 75:1,20 76:1,8 86:23 107:5,25 10 107:5,25 10 107:5,25 10 107:5,25 10 107:5,25 10 107:5,25 10 107:25 83:7,11,18,22 107:25	:12,12 17 08:2,14 10:9
100:9 101:11,13 101:10,12 75:11,20 76:1,8 79:1,2 81:2,4 104:7 105:1 101:14 103:18,19 happens 105:15 76:12,12 79:25 86:23 107:5,25 10 104:17 105:4,5,10 happy 95:21 80:8 81:15 82:9 interested 94:24 knowledge 11 105:13,17,18,19 hard 80:14 84:7 87:5,7 89:5 introduce 82:6,11 La 85:6 107:21,24,25 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions Lacey 70:19 7 108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	08:2,14 10:9
101:14 103:18,19 happens 105:15 76:12,12 79:25 86:23 107:5,25 10 103:20 104:2,10 happy 95:21 80:8 81:15 82:9 interested 94:24 knowledge 11 105:13,17,18,19 hard 80:14 84:7 87:5,7 89:5 introduce 82:6,11 La 85:6 107:21,24,25 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions Lacey 70:19 7 108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	08:2,14 10:9
103:20 104:2,10 happy 95:21 80:8 81:15 82:9 interested 94:24 knowledge 11 104:17 105:4,5,10 107:25 83:7,11,18,22 introduce 82:6,11 L 106:8,24 107:11 hear 80:6 82:18 96:24 97:2 99:3,8 83:25 87:5 La 85:6 107:21,24,25 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions Lacey 70:19 (laid 97:14) 108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	10:9
104:17 105:4,5,10 107:25 83:7,11,18,22 international 88:7 L 105:13,17,18,19 hard 80:14 84:7 87:5,7 89:5 introduce 82:6,11 La 85:6 107:21,24,25 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions Lacey 70:19 7 108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	
105:13,17,18,19 hard 80:14 84:7 87:5,7 89:5 introduce 82:6,11 La 85:6 106:8,24 107:11 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions Lacey 70:19 7 108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	74:1
103.13,17,18,19 106:8,24 107:11 106:8,24 107:11 107:21,24,25 108:2,17 108:22 108:22 108:24 107:4 108:25 108:25 108:26 108:26 108:27 108	74:1
107:21,24,25 90:7 99:9 105:24 introductions 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	74:1
108:2,17 heard 89:14 95:14 108:22 82:24 107:4 laid 97:14	/4:1
100.2,17 Italy 07.14 100.22 02.24 107.4	
CHI 10.77.20 102.6.7.106.22 14VAC72.12.14 1DD 96.12.12 19ngii 9ge 102	
103:0,7 100:25 12,110 73:13,11 1242 00:12,13	
104:12 107:3 107:8 76:17 91:10 issue 75:12 law 71:6 74:1	,
give 76:2 80:2 hearing 70:11 74:8 issues 76:14 85:18 78:12 79:7	85:5
82:10 81:18 82:13,14 91:19,20 96:6 85:14	
given 79:19 91:22 89:12,16,23 90:7 i.e 105:15 106:5 laws 78:18,20	*
104:2 90:9,13 91:20 identify 82:15 lease 96:3 10:	5:13
gives 78:21 95:15 96:25 103:6 III 70:11 105:13	
go 76:9 95:1,10 105:18 107:9 improving 80:23 January 86:2 leases 88:22	
108:25 109:4,5 inaudible 77:10 Jay 71:4 74:15 leasing 73:13	,14
goes 104:16 heater 77:22 78:1,3 include 102:11 JD 85:5 76:16,17,21	77:1
going 90:2,17,20 79:17 80:14 86:22 107:21 Jeff 71:10 75:2 77:5,7,13,15	8,20
91:7,8,12,14 91:24 93:17 94:14 included 81:10 jeff.roberson@ut 78:1 79:4,11	2,13
93:22 96:17 97:10,15,18,21 85:19 102:16,23 71:13 88:23 92:9	101:5
100:16 101:9 98:13 99:21 107:18 joined 74:13 legal 85:16	
102:10,15 103:14 105:16 106:8,9,11 including 77:18 joining 85:13 86:2 let's 74:6,16 8	30:6
103:20 107:12,17 106:12,14,22 79:15 89:18 joint 104:10 82:13,14 84	1:4
107:22,23,24 heaters 100:6 107:25 judge 70:13,13 letter 93:15	
108:9,16 heating 77:19 income 79:15 86:13 74:6,12,13,24 letters 93:11	102:10
good 74:19 75:1	:18,20
76:10 83:1,4,9,14 held 76:25 77:5 indicated 95:23 76:8,12,12,12 107:22	
89:8 94:5,9,11 90:13 information 77:16 79:25 80:8 81:15 level 92:15 97	7:19
97:11 99:7 106:20 help 86:6 88:12 77:21 79:10 81:25 82:9 83:7,11,18 102:7	
governs 78:9 helpful 77:16 93:12,20 99:22 83:22 84:7 87:5,7 light 91:18,20)
graduated 88:9 102:25 100:1 101:21 89:5 96:23 97:2 list 75:22	
Grand 73:13 76:17 helping 103:20 102:12,15,21,23 99:3,8,9 105:23 LLC 70:21	
great 79:5 hey 105:17 107:17 105:24 108:22 LLP 71:22	
group 86:11,12,13 higher 97:22 informed 77:17 JUDGES 71:6 local 108:1	
groups 86:13 highly 80:19 79:10 July 70:15 74:1,7 locally 106:25	5
growth 81:7 83:3 Historically 98:12 informs 86:23 June 90:14 long 76:22 93	
marantees 70.5.6 hold 87.18 98.4 initial 94.2 99.4 97.14	
guess 94:18 101:23 home 99:15,19 104:21 K longer 107:14	1
guide 86:16 Honor 74:19 80:10 insofar 99:14 kind 92:18 102:24 looks 99:11	
H hoped 101:20 kinds 100:15 losses 78:7,8	
hand 83:20 Inoped 101.20 Intends 102:7 Kingdom 88:9 Iot 92:2,3,24	95:14

				raye 113
103:9	83:14 84:12,13,14	occupation 84:22		74:20,22
low 79:15 86:12	84:14 87:11,12,13	occur 101:13	P 71:1,1 72:1,1	personal 103:18
	87:14 106:5	occurs 95:25	74:4	personally 104:22
M	National 70:24	offer 91:13		petition 84:3
M 84:10 87:9	natural 86:7,7	offered 76:21 91:15	PacifiCorp's 86:12	phase 92:6
Madison 85:15	NE 71:22	103:21	package 91:13	phone 93:22 104:14
main 77:13 97:13	nearly 80:22	offering 79:5	PAGE 73:2,8	105:1
maintain 92:15	necessary 78:23	office 71:11,17 75:9	Pages 70:12	picked 91:5
making 76:19 92:4	need 79:10 90:19	83:16 84:19 85:15	Paisner 71:16 73:3	piece 93:14
108:6,10,15	negotiations	100:21 101:1	75:7,7,19 79:23	plan 73:14 77:19
management 73:13	107:20	oil 88:7	81:20 82:9 84:7,8	77:24 78:2 79:15
86:15 88:7	new 88:15 90:2	Okay 82:12 89:14	84:11 87:3	89:18 90:24 91:4
manner 80:15 95:2	94:15,23 95:3	90:11 100:3 101:8	panel 72:2 82:19	102:6 105:10,10
market 108:2	96:1 97:9 99:14	101:18 103:5	83:21 108:25	
master's 85:6 88:6		101:18 103:3	part 75:23 90:23,25	plans 93:13
matters 85:17 86:4	99:19,22,25 100:4		91:2,6 95:22	please 83:20 84:12
maximizes 80:15	100:6	108:4	98:23 101:5 104:9	85:4,12 88:1
mean 100:14	newer 97:23	Olympia 70:23	105:1 107:19	pleased 106:23
104:22	nexus 100:7	71:12	participants 101:4	107:5
measures 103:25	nonresponse 105:4	online 104:12	participate 90:20	PO 71:12
	North 85:18 91:12	open 89:6	participated 88:14	point 82:4 89:2,6
meeting 100:24 mention 108:1	notably 88:21	opening 76:2,5	participating 91:3	100:7 105:15,19
	note 97:3	80:3,9	participation 77:25	108:15
mentioned 95:14	noted 76:13 83:24	opens 99:20	79:12 94:20 96:4	policy 85:14,17
106:7	notes 76:19,22	operate 95:3	109:2	political 85:9
mentioning 98:20	notices 104:21	Operations 86:15	particular 89:23,25	position 87:18
Mexico 88:15	number 86:25	opportunity 80:2	parties 75:13 76:2	possession 96:2
Michael 71:7 74:11	89:15 99:12 103:7	82:6,11 83:25	76:5 77:4,5 78:14	possible 91:8,13
85:25		84:5	78:19 79:20 80:2	93:3 103:24 107:7
minimizes 80:16	0	oppose 97:9	89:10 91:17 107:4	107:13
minor 108:15	O 74:4 84:10 87:9	opposed 97:8,13	parties' 78:6	potential 76:25
monthly 101:4,13	87:14	option 77:24 78:2	partnered 92:21	potentially 76:6
morning 74:19	O'Connell 72:4	options 77:19 79:15	106:8	predecessors 76:20
75:1 76:10,13	73:4 83:9,10	82:1 91:10 100:20	party 82:15,22 91:1	predominantly
83:1,4,9,14 89:8	87:11,13 89:3	103:3	pay 93:16 96:17	99:18
94:5,9,11 97:11	91:17,25,25 93:7	order 77:2,16 78:22	97:16,22	prefiled 75:14,21
99:7 106:5	94:8 97:6,11,12	90:19	paying 97:20	75:24 76:19 81:10
move 82:13 92:10	101:25 102:3	organization 85:20	payment 77:19,24	premise 99:24
99:24,24	106:7	outlined 89:17	78:2 79:15 93:13	preserves 78:5
Movers 86:6	O'Connell's 98:11	101:14	101:17 103:22	presume 97:9
moving 86:5	o0o 74:3	outright 98:14	Pearson 70:13 71:7	pretty 92:14 101:19
multiple 88:20	objectives 80:18	overall 101:5	74:13 76:12	previously 88:19
	obligation 97:25	overview 73:13	period 78:3 82:2	95:4,7,23
N	obligations 77:21	88:1	93:21 103:19	principles 86:15
N 71:1 72:1 74:4	obtain 78:22	owner 96:1 108:17	104:16 105:3	98:4
84:10,10 87:9,9	obviously 103:7	ownership 93:16	Perkins 71:22	prior 85:13,23
name 74:11,20 75:2	107:3	r	1 CI KIIIS / 1.22	
		I	I	I

				rage 110
104:18 105:2	92:21 106:20,25	95:14 97:8 98:10	rating 106:18	80:9 81:19,21
probably 90:10	108:1,18	102:18 103:6	Rayne 71:7 74:13	remember 105:17
proceeding 80:13	provides 77:14	102.18 103.0	RCW 78:22	Rendahl 70:13 71:3
80:18,19	92:2,8 93:20	Puget 70:7 71:20	reach 105:9,17	74:14 76:11 80:4
process 77:8,11	providing 81:25	74:10,21 82:17	reached 76:23	89:8,9,14,24 90:9
80:20,22,24 90:15	91:9 95:19 100:22	83:3 84:2 101:4	reaching 93:24	91:16 93:4 94:1
90:17 101:14	106:13	purchase 73:11	104:22	95:14 106:2,3
104:15	provision 78:10	77:22 78:1 79:17	reading 96:12	107:16 108:4,8,20
	96:21	91:1 96:12 98:14	real 96:2	rental 76:16 80:15
product 81:6 83:2 85:24		98:21		86:22 89:1 91:9
	provisions 96:13 98:24		really 98:5 102:25 103:1	92:23 106:9
professional 73:10		purchasing 77:18		
73:16	proxy 107:13	purposes 87:25	Realtime 70:21	renting 98:14
program 77:1,5,7	PSE 72:3,4 74:18	putting 104:11	reason 97:12,13	replacement
77:14 78:1 79:4	74:23 75:18 76:6	0	99:16	106:21
79:12 86:22,23	76:20 77:6,8,13	qualifi- 81:9	reasonable 98:2	REPORTED 70:20
89:1 90:20 91:24	77:15,19,20 78:7	qualifications	reasons 79:3	reporter 75:23
92:6,9,10,23	78:22 79:3,9 80:8	73:10,16 81:10	receive 93:12,14	110:7
94:14,19,19,23	80:10,11,13 81:1	82:8 84:1,6	101:4	Reporting 70:21
95:2,4,5,15,16,18	81:2,5,12 82:24	'	received 88:11	Reports 86:14
95:23,25 96:4,7	83:6 86:21 88:23	quality 92:13,15,18 106:13	receiving 93:10	represent 86:10
96:15 97:10,13	89:10 90:4 91:15		record 74:6 75:23	representatives
98:5,13,15 99:13	92:6 93:23,23,24	question 91:18 94:7	82:5,8 84:2,12	82:22
101:5 103:22	94:13,24 95:19	96:11,24 97:6	87:12 92:16 109:6	representing 75:3
106:11,15	96:15,24 103:3,20	99:3,11 106:3	records 87:23	85:19,20
programs 76:23	104:11 105:13,18	108:9	redress 100:12	request 79:21
prong 78:25 79:1,1	106:7,16,20	questioning 94:2	reduce 90:1,10	89:19 90:15,23
proper 78:6	107:10,21	questions 79:22	reevaluate 95:10	92:20 95:6 97:1
property 78:23	PSE's 76:15 77:1,2	80:1 81:9,16	regard 78:17,25	106:6
proposal 102:5	80:17 81:6,7	82:12 87:4 89:3,6	101:23,24	requested 83:25
proposed 102:9	86:10 90:5 91:24	89:10 94:4,7 99:5	regarding 82:1	required 77:4
protection 85:25	92:21 106:10,12	101:19,20,24	regulated 87:24	103:15
protections 87:1	106:14	103:4 105:23,25	98:7	requirement 78:17
93:9	PSE-provided	108:21,23	regulation 87:20	78:22 81:8
provide 75:22	107:14	quite 91:21	100:10	requirements 78:17
77:16,24 79:9	public 71:15 72:5	R	regulatory 81:8	83:5
82:7 88:1 89:25	75:5,8,19 76:6		83:6,10,15 84:20	research 85:24
90:3,18 91:7	78:13,19,24 79:1	R 71:1 72:1 74:4	84:23 87:19,20,21	reservations 94:13
92:18,25 94:24	79:1,2 80:8 81:3	110:1	88:12,14,16,17	residential 99:25
95:10,21 98:3	81:18,21,24 82:10	raise 83:20	94:18	resolve 76:14
100:13 106:21	82:12 83:12,16,24	raised 89:15,20,22	reject 96:14	resolving 77:2
107:1,7,12,13	84:4,18,23 85:1,6	91:21	related 85:17 88:22	Resource 86:11
108:5	85:7,13,22 86:2	rate 77:3 85:21	relevant 78:20	resources 92:3
provided 88:22	86:10,14,15,18,20	86:8 87:24 88:20	88:21	respond 93:25
89:19 107:17	86:22 89:12,16	88:25 98:3	remaining 93:11	104:21
provider 79:4 91:6	90:13 91:20,21	rates 97:17,19,23	remarks 76:5 80:3	responded 93:24
 ^	,	98:1		_
		<u> </u>	l	<u> </u>

05.1.105.2	100.00	0640200045	G. 99 00 11	01.10.00.100.1
97:1 105:2	seated 83:23	86:18,20 89:17	Staff's 98:11	81:12,22 102:4
Respondent 70:9	Seattle 70:22,23	91:23 92:2,7,7,25	stand 83:20	Supreme 76:24
response 89:19	71:18 88:10	93:2,8,9,20 105:1	start 74:16 94:9	sure 82:6 90:8 92:4
92:20	second 78:25 79:8	107:19 109:5	started 100:17	98:1 107:18
responses 106:6	section 87:20	seven 99:14	state 75:9 76:24	108:15
responsible 87:22	secure 90:3	sheet 102:24	83:16 84:12,19	Susan 72:4 81:7
Restitution 86:6	seeing 98:22	Sheree 74:22	85:9 87:11 110:3	83:4
restrictions 94:18	seen 92:17 104:3	short 74:16	110:7	swear 82:17 83:19
95:9	sees 81:24	Shorthand 110:6	stated 82:2	sworn 83:21
retail 96:7	SEF-1(C) 73:15	side 99:19 106:19	statement 76:2	system 99:23 100:1
retention 107:11	SEF-2 73:16	signed 91:1	statements 81:22	
revenue 81:8 83:5	select 77:9	significant 106:21	stating 92:20	T
review 78:10 96:20	selection 107:11	similar 91:18	statutory 97:25	T 84:10 87:9 110:1
reviewed 98:20	sell 76:16 77:7,13	simply 104:21,24	stay 92:9	110:1
reviews 87:25	79:4 86:21 90:16	105:9	Steele 71:21 74:19	tailored 93:10
revised 107:20	94:14	Simultaneous	74:20,24 75:18	102:21
right 76:8 83:20	selling 81:1	102:2	79:23 80:10 81:15	take 93:16 96:1
96:10,23 97:4	senior 85:20 103:8	siting 85:22	81:17 87:2	102:4,12 105:15
98:17,25 99:7	sense 76:18	situation 86:25	Stephanie 72:5	105:20 107:24
100:8,8 101:3	service 76:16,17	skill 110:9	73:2 83:15 84:14	108:19
102:17 105:21	78:20 79:1,7	smooth 93:3	stipulate 75:14,16	taken 100:4
Roberson 71:10	80:15 81:2 85:22	sorry 78:21 106:4	Street 71:22	takes 96:1
73:5 75:1,2,16	87:24 90:4 91:6,8	sound 70:7 71:20	strong 91:6	talk 107:25
76:4,8,10 79:25	91:13 92:13,15,18	74:10,21 82:17	strongly 81:1	talking 102:2
80:1,12 81:22	92:21 94:25 95:21	83:3 84:2 90:10	107:10	Tayler 70:20 110:6
87:1,7,10 89:2	95:25 97:19	South 85:9,10,18	subject 100:10	110:13
rulemaking 86:9,9	100:13,22 101:24	Southeast 70:18	submit 78:19 82:5	technical 86:12
	105:15,20 106:9	space 99:20	submitted 75:13	TELEPHONIC
<u>S</u>	106:11,13,14,17	speak 103:24	92:16,19	70:11
S 71:1 72:1 74:4	106:20,24 107:1	104:13	sufficient 98:2	tell 98:22 106:11
sale 78:7,23,24	107:10,13,15,24	specializing 88:4	suggestion 108:19	telling 100:15
80:21 82:1 91:24	108:1,17,18	specific 96:6,21	suitable 98:6	tells 93:15
96:12,14,17 100:9	services 76:21,22	102:21	Suite 70:22 71:17	temporarily 82:23
sales 99:16,19	87:20 95:19 96:7	specifically 93:15	71:22	ten 94:20
salvage 102:8	set 80:25 84:1,5	103:25	Super 86:4	tension 108:15
satisfaction 95:16	101:16 103:22	spell 84:13 87:12	supplement 80:3	term 102:24
100:13	105:6	spelled 84:15 87:14	supplementation	terminate 77:25
satisfactorily 99:2	settlement 70:11	spread 78:2	76:6	79:11 92:6
saw 90:22	74:8 76:3,14,18	Square 70:18	support 76:2 82:2	termination 96:13
saying 105:17	77:3,10,12,23	stability 79:5	86:18,20 93:8	96:16
107:9	78:5,10,11,13,16	Staff 71:9 72:4	102:4	terms 77:20 78:11
scenario 95:11	78:19,21 79:2,3	74:25 75:3,16	supported 98:12	89:17 92:3 100:24
School 85:6,7	79:14,19 80:12,17	82:10 83:8,10,25	supporting 81:1	102:6,15
science 85:9 88:3,4	80:18,23 81:12,13	87:5 88:24 92:1	104:17	testified 88:18,20
seamless 103:23	81:23,24 82:3	97:7,12,13 102:4	supports 80:12	testifying 82:22
107:1				84:25 85:1
	•	•	•	•

	I	İ	İ	Ī
testimony 73:9,15	Transformation	Universidad 88:5	97:15,18,21 98:12	WTE-2 73:10
75:15,21,24 76:20	86:8	University 85:5,7,9	99:21 100:6	WTE-3(C) 73:11
77:8 81:1,11 82:5	transition 73:14	85:25 88:8,9,15	105:16 106:8,9,10	WTE-4 73:13
82:19 88:22 109:1	80:21,24 82:2	urge 78:14,15	106:12,14,17,22	WTE-5 73:14
thank 74:24 75:4	89:18 90:18,24	use 92:3,22	way 77:7 86:23	www.buellrealti
75:11,20 79:25	91:4 92:4,12,25	useful 78:23	97:14 98:5 102:13	70:25
80:4 81:14,15	93:2,18 101:15	Usually 95:25	ways 92:10 103:21	
83:7,11,18,22	102:5,19 103:19	utilities 70:2,4,18	we'll 82:10,10 89:6	X
84:7,16,21 85:3	103:20 104:1,8,18	74:9 86:14 87:16	108:18	X 84:10 87:9
85:11 86:17 87:3	107:2,7 108:9,11	91:11	we're 74:7 104:2	Y
87:7 89:5 90:12	transitioned 105:4	utility 85:21 86:15	107:25	
91:16 93:4 94:1	transmission 85:21	101:5	we've 101:21	yeah 88:20 93:6
97:4 98:8,17,25	transportation		website 104:10	99:18 101:18
99:9 101:2 102:3	70:2,4,18 74:10	V	Wednesday 74:7	year 80:13 86:3
104:4 105:21,24	86:4 87:17	value 97:17	Wein- 106:4	years 76:18 94:20
108:20,22,25	treatment 78:7,8	variety 85:16 86:3	Weinstein 89:11	99:14 106:18
109:6	true 94:17 98:5	various 87:22	went 77:8	yield 79:23 99:5
thing 77:23	110:8	88:16	whichever 102:13	$\overline{\mathbf{z}}$
things 77:13	truly 92:5,11	vehicle 92:5	William 72:3 81:6	
think 89:25 92:2,13	try 97:18 103:23	vendor 106:17	willing 75:13	0
92:24 93:19 95:1	105:5	Venezuela 88:5,6	Wisconsin 85:5,15	
95:8 98:15,20	turn 82:20,23 94:3	versus 74:10	85:18,22	1
101:19 102:14,22	99:8	video 82:21,23	Wisconsin-Madi	10:17 109:7
102:25 103:18	two 82:17	virtual 82:14	85:8 86:1	10885 71:22
108:14	type 95:5 96:7	VOLUME 70:11	wish 77:25 79:16	12-month 78:3
thinking 108:5		vs 70:6	80:3	120-day 104:8,16
third 77:23 79:14	U		witness 72:2 82:7	105:3
thoughts 79:24	UE-151871 88:23		82:16 83:8,12,21	1325 70:22
three 79:3	UE-170033 88:25	WAC 78:9,21	87:6 88:24	15 70:15 74:1
THURSTON 110:4	UG-151872 88:23	79:20	witness's 84:5	15th 74:7
time 81:19 82:18	UG-170032 88:25	wait 100:18 want 81:20 82:5	witnesses 82:11,13	17 88:25
83:20 93:21 94:16	UG-200112 70:4		82:15,17,18,19,20	1840 70:22
96:2,3,5,5,8 97:16	74:8 76:15	90:8,20	82:25 84:1 109:1	18th 90:14,14
98:14 99:4 103:2	uncomfortable	wanting 94:13	Woodland 70:18	1971 76:23
104:16 105:3,15	92:12	Washington 70:1,4 70:18,19,22 71:12	work 85:19,19	
timeframe 104:8,8	undepreciated	71:18,23 74:1,9	90:17 105:5	2
today 74:7,8,13	93:12	75:9 83:16 84:19	106:22	2000 71:17 99:15
81:5,13 85:1 91:7	underlying 97:17	86:6 87:16 88:10	worked 80:14	100:4
107:14 109:1,5	understand 80:21	106:9 110:3,7	85:13,16,23 86:3	2016 76:24 88:9,15
top 92:18	103:1 108:14	wasn't 90:16 91:14	working 86:7 91:11	88:24
training 88:11,15	understanding	107:19	104:7	2017 77:2
trainings 88:16	103:19	water 77:19,22	works 98:5	2020 70:15 74:1,7
transaction 96:3	unhappiness 95:18	78:1,3 79:17	wrap 86:23	81:23 86:16,19
104:19	Unit 75:9 83:16	80:14 86:21 91:24	writing 82:5	206 70:23 71:18,23
transcript 110:8	84:18,24 85:2	93:17 94:14 97:10	WTE-1T(C) 73:9	22nd 81:23 86:19
	United 88:8	73.17 77.17 77.10		287-9066 70:23

				Page 119
	I	I		I
3				
3358 70:20 110:13				
359-3758 71:23				
360 70:23 71:13				
4				
40-07-740 78:9				
79:20				
40128 71:12				
4th 71:22				
401 / 1.22				
5				
521-3211 71:18				
534-9066 70:23				
6				
60 105:5				
621 70:18				
664-1188 71:13				
7				
70-110 70:12				
700 71:22				
75 73:9,10,11,13,14				
73:15,16				
8				
80.12.020's 78:22				
800 70:24 71:17				
84 73:3				
846-6989 70:24				
87 73:5				
9				
9 96:13 98:20				
9:30 70:16 74:2,7				
98004 71:23				
98101 70:22				
98104 71:18				
98503 70:19				
98504 71:12				
	•	•	•	•