Docket No. UG-190210 - Vol. III

Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission v. Cascade Natural Gas Corporation

November 5, 2019



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BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION		1 2	APPEARANCES (Cont.)		
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND,) DOCKET UG-190210		3	FOR THE ENERGY PROJECT:		
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION) Complainant,)		4	SIMON FFITCH Attorney at Law		
) vs.)		5	321 High School Road NE		
CASCADE NATURAL GAS)		6	Suite D3, No. 383 Bainbridge Island, Washington 98110		
CORPORATION,)		7	(206) 669-8197 simon@ffitchlaw.com		
Respondent.)		8 9	FOR AWEC:		
			CHAD STOKES Cable Huston LLP		
SETTLEMENT HEARING, VOLUME III		10	1455 SW Broadway, Suite 1500 Portland, Oregon 97201		
Pages 20-42 CHAIRMAN DANNER, COMMISSIONER RENDAHL,		11	(503) 224-3092 cstokes@cablehuston.com		
COMMISSIONER BALASBAS, JUDGE PEARSON		12	WITNESSES:		
November 5, 2019		14	MICHAEL PARVINEN, Cascade BETTY ERDAHL, Commission Staff		
9:04 a.m. Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission		15	SHAWN COLLINS, The Energy Project SARAH LAYCOCK, Public Counsel		
621 Woodland Square Loop Southeast Lacey, Washington 98503		16 17	BRAD MULLINS, AWEC		
REPORTED BY: TAYLER GARLINGHOUSE, CCR 3358		18 19			
Buell Realtime Reporting, LLC 1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 1840		20 21			
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P.O. Box 40128 Olympia, Washington 98504 (360) 664-1188		11	JT-5 Professional Qualifications of Shawn 27		
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2 EXHIBITS FOR ADMISSION PAGE 3 MCP-3 Revenue Requirement Calculation (3/29/19) 27	2	9:04 A.M.
(2 pages)	3	000
MCP-4 Conversion Factor Calculation (3/29/19) 27	4	PROCEEDINGS
5 (2 pages)	5	
6 MCP-5 Summary of Proposed Adjustments to Test 27 Year Results (3/29/19) (2 pages)	6	JUDGE PEARSON: Let's get started. Good
7	7	morning. Today is Tuesday, November 5th, 2019, at 9:04
MCP-6 2019 Plant Additions (3/29/19) (4 pages) 27	8	a.m., and we're here today for a settlement hearing in
MPP-1T Prefiled Direct Testimony of Michael P. 27 Parvinen (3/29/19) (16 pages)	9	Docket UG-190210, which is captioned Washington
MPP-2 Working Capital Summary (3/29/19) (2 pages) 27	10	Utilities and Transportation Commission versus Cascade
MPP-3 Comparison of Actual Results to 27 Authorized Return (3/29/19) (2 pages)		·
2	11	Natural Gas Corporation.
MPP-4 2019 Plant Additions Not Included for 27 Recovery (3/29/19) (2 pages)	12	My name is Rayne Pearson. I'm an
4 TJN-1T Prefiled Direct Testimony of Tammy J. 27	13	administrative law judge with the Commission, and I am
Nygard (3/29/19) (7 pages) 5	14	joined today by Chair Dave Danner, Commissioner Ann
TJN-2C Cascade's Currently Outstanding Debt 27	15	Rendahl, and Commissioner Jay Balasbas.
(3/29/19) (2 pages) (CONFIDENTIAL) 7 TJN-3C Long-Term Debt (3/29/19) (2 pages) 27	16	So let's begin by taking short form
(CONFIDENTIAL)	17	appearances from the parties beginning with the Company
BLR-1T Prefiled Direct Testimony of Brian L. 27	18	and then we'll go around the room.
Robertson (3/29/19) (5 pages) BLR-2 Weather Normalization Regressions 27	19	MS. PEASE: Jocelyn Pease with McDowell
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2 (2 pages)	22	Huston law firm for the Alliance of Western Energy
B IDM-1T Prefiled Direct Testimony of Isaac D. 27 Myhrum (3/29/19) (21 pages)	23	Consumers.
1	24	MR. FFITCH: Simon ffitch, Attorney,
IDM-2 Summary of Revenues by Rate Schedule 27 (3/29/19) (10 pages)	25	appearing on behalf of The Energy Project.
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1 EXHIBIT INDEX (Cont.)		MS. GAFKEN: Lisa Gafken, Assistant Attorney
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Commissioners. Before you this morning is the settlement, which resolves all issues in Cascade's 2019 general rate case filing. Per WAC 40-07-700, the Commission supports the parties' informal efforts to resolve disputes. Per WAC 480-07-740, the Commission will approve the settlement if the terms are lawful and in the public interest.

The parties before you today ask you to make a finding that the settlement before you is in the public interest and its terms are lawful based on the record before you, which as Judge Pearson just mentioned, consists of the testimony submitted with Cascade's general rate case filing, the joint testimony submitted in support of the settlement, which includes the separate statements of every party, and the testimony that you will hear from Mr. Parvinen, Ms. Erdahl, Ms. Laycock, Mr. Collins, and Mr. Mullins, who I believe is on the phone today.

Before turning to the terms of the settlement, a few words about what's not in it. As Ms. Kivisto makes clear in the early part of her testimony, this is the third rate case Cascade has filed since 2015. This settlement really builds on those earlier -- the settlements that resolved those earlier rate cases wherein the Commission approved a decoupling

changing -- changing operating expenses and investment in the utility and its property for public service.

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So with that in mind, turning to the terms of the settlement. The settlement provides for a \$6.5 million increase to Cascade's revenue requirement. It specifies all the elements of the rate of return, so the capital structure is specified at 49.1 percent equity, 50.9 percent debt. Cascade's cost of debt is specified at 5.155 percent. Cascade's return on equity is specified at 9.4 percent. I believe that leads to an overall rate of return to 7.24 percent. I'm pretty sure that's right, but go with whatever's written down.

There are other miscellaneous terms. The change in revenue requirement is spread per what I just discussed, which is the terms of the Commission's order in the last rate case, which is equal percentage of margin basis except for special contracts. And the final settlement term is that Cascade will continue to comply with the conservation targets that it agreed to in its -- the settlement of its 2015 rate case.

As mentioned before, the Commission will approve rates when they're lawful and in the public interest. In terms of lawfulness, the rates must be fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient and free of defects such as unreasonable preference or prejudice to

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mechanism, it approved a method for weather normalization, it dealt with cost of service by requiring the Company to conduct a load study to measure the usage of its core classes, it addressed rate spread by requiring any change in Cascade's revenue requirement be spread on an equal percent of margin basis except for special contracts.

Until Cascade completes that load study, the Commission also addressed rate design. In essence, it froze Cascade's rates, the basic charges, until the completion of that load study. It also, I think in the last rate case, dealt with the allocation of cost between shareholders and ratepayers concerning Cascade's validation of its distribution system.

There are other mechanisms that were put in place outside rate cases. For example, I believe it's Mr. Myhrum and Mr. Parvinen's testimony discuss the cost recovery mechanism, which allows Cascade to recover fairly expeditiously its investment in making its system safe.

All of that is not on the table in this rate case because it's already been dealt with. So really this rate case concerns largely Cascade's change of revenue requirement. Ms. Kivisto makes clear that that's basically what drove this rate case is

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certain classes of ratepayers. In terms of whether or not rates are fair, sufficient, and in the public interest, the Commission balances the interest of Cascade with the interest of its ratepayers.

Here you should note that this is an all-party settlement, which means Cascade has affirmed that the settlement appropriately takes into account its interest in recovering its expenses and allowing it to earn a reasonable rate of return on its investment and property dedicated to public service.

And Cascade's ratepayers are represented by residential ratepayers, Public Counsel's on board with the settlement, small business as well, Public Counsel. Cascade's low income customers are represented by The Energy Project, Cascade's industrial customers are represented by AWEC. The representatives from all those parties have signed onto the settlement.

From that, you can tell that it balances Cascade's customers' interest and reasonable rates for the services they receive. Commission Staff, which has no ratepayer constituency but which exist to make sure that the Commission assesses rates that are fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient, is also signatory to the settlement.

So with that in mind, I will turn the

Page 32 Page 34 1 proceeding over to the witnesses for questions unless 1 that's great that you've all been able to resolve your 2 2 you have questions for me. issues, but it is a complete black box settlement in 3 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Any questions for 3 many ways. And one of the issues that Cascade brought 4 forward in their case was the concern about being able 4 counsel before we bring the witnesses up? 5 Okay. So let's bring the witnesses forward 5 to sufficiently recover the investment and property and 6 to this table in front, and I will swear them in and 6 reduce the lag, the regulatory lag, but we don't have 7 7 make them available for questions from the any idea of how much investment actually the parties 8 Commissioners. Just if -- counsel, if you want to take 8 have agreed to. We expect the Company to come back to 9 9 seats behind the witnesses for now. us with a rate case soon. 10 And, Mr. Mullins, are you on the line? 10 How do we know, while you all may know, how 11 MR. MULLINS: I am on the line. Can you 11 do we know how much of that investment and property is 12 12 in rate base so that we can assess going forward, if hear me? 13 JUDGE PEARSON: We can hear you loud and 13 there is no settlement in the future, where we are, 14 clear. Thank you. 14 what's our baseline? And so that's just a question I 15 MR. MULLINS: Great. Thank you. have for you. I know you can't reveal what's -- what's 15 16 JUDGE PEARSON: Mr. Parvinen, if you want to 16 in the settle- -- what you settled, but just to note 17 17 that it's an issue. So how do we deal with that going grab that other microphone. 18 Okay. So I will have you all please stand 18 forward? 19 and raise your right hand. 19 MR. PARVINEN: This is Mike Parvinen. I 20 Mr. Mullins, that goes for you too. 20 guess I -- I'll -- I'll start off with one of the things 21 21 I will swear you all in together. that -- one of the agreed upon items in the settlement (Witness panel sworn.) 22 is that -- that -- that we're really not authorizing any 2.2 23 23 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. You may be seated. sort of rate base in this proceeding. So typically when 24 Okay. So please introduce yourselves for 24 you have a rate case, one of the things you do is 25 the record and identify who you're representing. We'll 25 authorize a level of -- of rate base where you start Page 33 Page 35 1 start with Mr. Parvinen followed by Ms. Erdahl, 1 with what was approved from the previous rate case and 2 2 then examine everything that was added since that --Mr. Collins, and Ms. Laycock. 3 3 And then, Mr. Mullins, you can go last. since that time. MR. PARVINEN: Sorry about that. Playing 4 4 Part of this settlement included actually 5 with the microphones. I missed the instructions. What 5 not authorizing -- not authorizing anything for rate 6 did you want me to do? 6 base. So when we go into our next rate case, we'll 7 JUDGE PEARSON: If you could just identify 7 actually be going back to the rate base from the 8 yourselves and who -- who you represent. 8 previous case. So no rate base is considered either in or out from what we had -- had filed. So it makes our 9 MR. PARVINEN: All right. Michael Parvinen, 9 10 representing Cascade Natural Gas. 10 jobs a little bit more expanded for the next rate case. MS. ERDAHL: Betty Erdahl, Commission Staff. 11 11 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you. That 12 MR. COLLINS: Shawn Collins, director of The 12 helps, but I'm curious to hear if anybody has a 13 13 Energy Project. different story. MS. LAYCOCK: Sarah Laycock with Public 14 MS. ERDAHL: This is Betty Erdahl from 14 15 15 Counsel. Staff. I would echo Mike Parvinen's comments, but also 16 16 MR. MULLINS: And Brad Mullins with the add we included language and agreed that we would look 17 17 Alliance of Western Energy Consumers. at prudence and take a look at the plan that's put in JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you.

So we, at this point, will open it up to

And after listening to Mr. Roberson's opening statement,

start. So this question is for -- for all the parties.

my concern is, while I appreciate all the parties that

have come in for an all-party settlement, and I think

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Okay. I guess I'll

questions from the Commissioners.

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rate base investment in the next rate case. So we're

that that's reasonable and audit it in the next rate

case. And there's many ways to get to a level of

in that respect, but just agree to the revenue

requirement of 6.5 million.

planned and get to the 6.5 million, so we truly differ

COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you.

leaving the door open so that we can see if we believe

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Anybody has anything to add, go forward, otherwise my colleagues have a question.

2.5

CHAIRMAN DANNER: All right. Thank you. Good morning. My question is for Mr. Parvinen. In Ms. Kivisto's testimony, in her direct testimony on page 7, she mentioned that -- the question was, does the Company believe the regulatory outcomes from Washington influence the recent downgrade of the Company stock. And in there, she quoted Fitch as saying that the Company has a challenging regulatory environment. And of course since we're the regulators, we're concerned about a statement like that if we have a challenging regulatory environment.

I actually looked at the Fitch report.

First, I would note that because our last rate case settled, this rate case is a proposal to settle, the MAOP penalty was settled, how do you know what the challenging regulatory environment is and is it -- should we be approving settlements or should we actually mitigate a case so that you can find out what the regulatory environment really is? I mean, is Fitch -- is Fitch concerned about cases settling or is there another issue that they have with the regulatory environment in Washington?

MR. PARVINEN: That's a tough question.

there is that -- you know, what are we addressing here?

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MR. PARVINEN: Yeah, it -- it -- it is difficult. I would say that one of our perspectives in -- in settling is -- is -- is as a settling party, we take into account what we think a litigated outcome would be as one of the -- as one of the conditions on -- on taking into account when we come up with a -- with a settlement offer or settlement proposal and accepting the settlement is -- is weigh that against what we think the possible outcomes will be.

So it's -- I would say that I guess it's true that we take into account, for example, the 944 that we've settled on. We -- we think that's in the ballpark of what the Commission is likely to come out with. It's -- it's our assumption that that's -- that that's a reasonable outcome without -- right, but without having that -- without having that -- that -- that -- that hearing, is that true -- is that true or

CHAIRMAN DANNER: Yeah, I think that's my point. I mean, there's a downgrade in your financial rating from a particular agency. I mean, it's still a healthy investment grade, but it's -- if -- if it's due to actions that this Commission has taken, if it's speculation about what this Commission may or may not

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Yeah, it's -- it's hard to -- it's hard to gauge how Fitch views the regulatory regime. Yes, I would agree that, with being the settlement is particularly the black box settlements, that -- that that does make it -- make things a little more -- more difficult when all the parties agree that the -- that the outcomes are fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient.

I think particularly concerning on the last rate case in particular was -- was it -- it became more of a convoluted rate case because of tax reform too and how that impacted the final outcome. So the final outcome looks substantially different than what was -- was originally filed, tax reform in the middle so...

CHAIRMAN DANNER: But the tax -- I mean, the tax issue, though, is not present in this case. And so the fact that this is included in the testimony in this case, I'm trying to figure out what the link to this case is. I mean, there's a challenging regulatory environment, take the taxes aside, I assume there's still -- because this is in the testimony, there's still a challenging regulatory environment. I noticed that they talked about the 94 being low average with the ROE, but, again, that was settled.

So I mean, if -- if there's challenging regulatory environment here, I want to figure out what

do, I mean, there's really only one way to prove that, and that's not to settle the cases.

And so, you know, I just want to make sure what my marching orders here are, because I think you're asking us to settle this case.

MR. PARVINEN: We are.

CHAIRMAN DANNER: All right. Thank you.
COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. This
question is to all the parties as -- as relates to the
provision in the settlement regarding the conservation
targets. And in the settlement, it states that the
terms from the settlement in Docket UG-152286 regarding
conservation targets shall remain in effect.

So this is really a clarifying question, and does that mean that all of Section E from that docket would remain in effect under the terms of this settlement? And whoever wants to take that first, go ahead.

MR. PARVINEN: I'm trying to -- this is Mike Parvinen. I'm trying to recall what Section E actually said. I don't have a copy of the order in front of me. I will say that the settlement in that docket had a number of conditions regarding conservation, and that every other condition is already in -- permanently in place either through other orders or other procedures so

5 (Pages 36 to 39)

	Page 40		Page 42
1	that that there was no need to act on those. I think	1	CERTIFICATE
2	the following settlement even even in the the	2	
3	the following settlement in '17, is it '17 docket? Had	3	STATE OF WASHINGTON
4	an exhibit that identified each of the conservation	4	COUNTY OF THURSTON
5	things that we're currently doing as far as the	5	
6	reporting, the plans, and things like that.	6	I, Tayler Garlinghouse, a Certified Shorthand
7	So it solidified it solidified through	7	Reporter in and for the State of Washington, do hereby
8	order all of those components so that those yeah, so	8	certify that the foregoing transcript is true and
9	that they're all in they're all in place. So I guess	9	accurate to the best of my knowledge, skill and ability.
10	you could say that in total, yes, it's basically keeping	10	
11	that intact, if that makes sense.	11	
12	MS. ERDAHL: And I would agree. I think	12	
13	what was proposed in this case was to deviate from one	13	Jayler Granlingheries.
14	aspect, and that's what we agreed not to deviate from	14	Tayler Garlinghouse, CCR 3358
15	the meeting of hundred percent of the target in the	15	
16	conservation plan.	16	
17	MS. LAYCOCK: I would agree with that as	17	
18	well. I believe the rest of them would be carried	18	
19	through.	19	
20	MR. MULLINS: And this is Brad. I would	20	
21	have the same response.	21	
22	COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: So all of them	22	
23	including the meeting a hundred percent of the target?	23	
24	I see nodding of head from Ms. Laycock.	24	
25	MS. LAYCOCK: Yes.	25	
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1	JUDGE PEARSON: Do we have any additional		
2	questions?		
3	Okay. Thank you to the panel of witnesses.		
4	We appreciate you being here giving testimony.		
5	Is there anything further that we need to		
6	address? Okay. Hearing nothing, that concludes the		
7	settlement hearing today, and we will adjourn and be off		
8	the record.		
9	Or do you have something?		
10	MS. GAFKEN: I have one thing.		
11	JUDGE PEARSON: Okay.		
12	MS. GAFKEN: It's a very simple thing. The		
13	public comment exhibit.		
14	JUDGE PEARSON: Yes.		
15	MS. GAFKEN: I wanted to ask for a due date,		
	and as per our usual request, I would ask for a week.		
16			
16 17	So I think that puts us at November 12th.		
16 17 18	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great.		
16 17 18 19	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great. MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you.		
16 17 18 19 20	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great. MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you. JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you.		
16 17 18 19 20 21	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great. MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you. JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. Okay. If there's nothing else, we will		
16 17 18 19 20 21 22	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great. MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you. JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. Okay. If there's nothing else, we will adjourn and be off the record. Thank you all.		
16 17 18 19 20 21	So I think that puts us at November 12th. JUDGE PEARSON: That sounds great. MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you. JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. Okay. If there's nothing else, we will		

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