

Energy Coalition A New Force

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There's a new light shining on the Indiana electric utility rate scene, which light comes from the Citizens Energy Coalition. The coalition, being organized in Indianapolis, South Bend, Ft. Wayne, Bloomington and Evansville, is designed to fight for consumers before the Indiana General Assembly and the Public Service Commission.

The new group will speak out on issues such as energy policy, utility rates, utility deposit policies and on the performance of the Public Service Commission, which rules on such as utility rates.

Influence Policies

The Citizens Energy Coalition will conduct research on utility issues, analyze utility rate increase requests and seek to influence policies of both the Public Service Commission and the General Assembly on energy matters.

Public Service Commission Chairman Larry J. Wallace says he believes the group's aims are good. Mr. Wallace says, however, that he hopes the coalition will "not try its cases in the news media."

Actually, it is to be hoped the coalition does use the news media to the fullest extent in its efforts insofar as it has been the public's failure to understand what is at

stake in such as Public Service Commission hearings that has, over recent years, encouraged rate hike after rate hike.

Citizens need to know the policies of both the Public Service Commission and the General Assembly in regard to energy matters so that they may, in turn, make intelligent and informed political decisions regarding both of these departments of government.

Political Agency

It is obvious that the General Assembly is a political entity, all of its members being elected, but it should also be emphasized that in many ways the Public Service Commission is also a political agency.

The commissioners are, after all, chosen by the man who is, in his office, the most powerful politician in the state, the governor. The three commission posts would have to be considered among the state's more choice political appointments.

With tens of millions of dollars in rate hikes at stake, also, it must be assumed that it has taken at least some political finesse on the part of the utilities to make sure that year after year the General Assembly continues to underfund, under-staff and overwork the Public Service

Commission and the accompanying office of Public Counselor to the commission.

There is, in short, a politics of energy in this state, and in politics, it is extremely legitimate insofar as one can to "try the case in the media."

What the Public Service Commission of Indiana does or is able to do regarding utility rates is both a direct and an indirect result of political decisions and attitudes by governors, past and present, and legislatures, past and present.

The public needs to be educated as to how the politics of energy works and the most effective way to get this knowledge to the public is through the news media.

'Right On!'

To the Citizens Energy Coalition, then, every Indiana utility customer—and that is all of us—ought to be calling out: "Right on!"

No group such as the coalition, however, in and of itself can save Hoosiers from continued rounds of higher utility bills.

The only way Hoosiers will save themselves from rate increases which are excessive is to do so at the ballot box, by electing governors and legislators who before election have made clear that in the politics of energy, the consumer stands first in priority.