

BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In re: Petition for rate increase by Gulf Power Company.

DOCKET NO. 160186-EI

In re: Petition for approval of 2016 depreciation and dismantlement studies, approval of proposed depreciation rates and annual dismantlement accruals and Plant Smith Units 1 and 2 regulatory asset amortization, by Gulf Power Company.

DOCKET NO. 160170-EI
ORDER NO. PSC-16-0585-PCO-EI
ISSUED: December 30, 2016

ORDER GRANTING PETITION TO INTERVENE BY
THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

Pursuant to Rule 25-6.140, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C), on August 12, 2016, Gulf Power Company (Gulf) filed a test year letter notifying this Commission of its intent to file a petition between October 11 and October 28, 2016, for an increase in rates effective 2017. Pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 366, Florida Statutes (F.S.), and Rules 25-6.0425 and 25-6.043, F.A.C., Gulf filed its Minimum Filing Requirements and testimony on October 12, 2016. The hearing on the rate case is scheduled for March 20 through March 24, 2017.

Petition for Intervention

On December 12, 2016, The League of Women Voters of Florida, Inc. (LWVF) filed a Petition for Intervention (Petition), requesting permission to intervene in this proceeding. LWVF is a nonpartisan political organization formed to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. LWVF asserts that it has a substantial number of members in Gulf's service territory, including the League of Women Voters of the Pensacola Bay Area chapter, the League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County chapter, and the League of Women Voters of Bay County chapter. LWVF states it recently launched an affordable energy initiative to educate citizens and LWVF's members about the potential to reduce utility bills, including through conservation, and to increase the affordability of solar energy for LWVF's members and the citizens of the state of Florida. As ratepayers, LWVF claims that its members would be adversely affected by the rate restructure proposed by Gulf in this proceeding, because the proposed rate restructure would result in a substantial increase in fixed charges. LWVF asserts that Gulf's proposed rate increase and rate restructure will result in substantial bill increases to LWVF's members. These interests are consistent with LWVF's mission on behalf of its members.

Standards for Intervention

Rule 25-22.039, F.A.C., provides:

Persons, other than the original parties to a pending proceeding, who have a substantial interest in the proceeding, and who desire to become parties may petition the presiding officer for leave to intervene. Petitions for leave to intervene must be filed at least five (5) days before the final hearing, must conform with Uniform subsection 28-106.201(2), F.A.C., and must include allegations sufficient to demonstrate that the intervenor is entitled to participate in the proceeding as a matter of constitutional or statutory right or pursuant to Commission rule, or that the substantial interests of the intervenor are subject to determination or will be affected through the proceeding. Intervenors take the case as they find it.

To have standing in an administrative proceeding, an intervenor must meet the two-prong standing test set forth in Agrico Chemical Company v. Department of Environmental Regulation, 406 So. 2d 478, 482 (Fla. 2nd DCA 1981). The intervenor must show that (1) he will suffer injury in fact, which is of sufficient immediacy to entitle him to a Section 120.57, F.S., hearing; and (2) the substantial injury is of a type or nature which the proceeding is designed to protect. The first prong of the test addresses the degree of injury. The second addresses the nature of the injury. The “injury in fact” must be both real and immediate and not speculative or conjectural. International Jai-Alai Players Assn. v. Florida Pari-Mutuel Commission, 561 So. 2d 1224, 1225-26 (Fla. 3rd DCA 1990); Village Park Mobile Home Assn., Inc. v. State Dept. of Business Regulation, 506 So. 2d 426, 434 (Fla. 1st DCA 1987), rev. den., 513 So. 2d 1063 (Fla. 1987) (speculation on the possible occurrence of injurious events is too remote).

The test for associational standing was established in Florida Home Builders v. Dept. of Labor and Employment Security, 412 So. 2d 351 (Fla. 1982), and Farmworker Rights Organization, Inc. v. Dept. of Health and Rehabilitative Services, 417 So. 2d 753 (Fla. 1st DCA 1982), which is also based on the basic standing principles established in Agrico. Associational standing may be found where: (1) the association demonstrates that a substantial number of an association’s members may be substantially affected by the Commission’s decision in a docket; (2) the subject matter of the proceeding is within the association’s general scope of interest and activity; and (3) the relief requested is of a type appropriate for the association to receive on behalf of its members.

Analysis & Ruling

It appears that the LWVF meets the two-prong standing test in Agrico, as well as, the three-prong associational standing test established in Florida Home Builders. The purpose of this proceeding is to determine the fair, just and reasonable electric rates to be charged by Gulf. The substantial interests of LWVF’s members are affected by this proceeding, since increases in the cost of electricity directly affect their monthly electric bills. Therefore, LWVF’s members meet the two-prong standing test of Agrico.

With respect to the first prong of the associational standing test, to have standing in an administrative proceeding, an association must demonstrate that a substantial number of its members are substantially affected by the proceeding. Florida Home Builders, 412 So. 2d at 353. Under Florida law, neither a specific number, nor percentage of association members, is required for standing. Hillsborough County v. Florida Restaurant Ass'n, Inc., 603 So. 2d 587, 589 (Fla. 2nd DCA 1992)(court found standing where 37 of 2,766 members were affected, because a substantial number of the members residing in the county at issue were affected). Here LWVF asserts that it has members located in Gulf's service territory that receive electric service from Gulf, for which they are charged Gulf's applicable service rates. Accordingly, LWVF states that its members will be substantially affected by this Commission's determination in this rate proceeding. Thus, I find that LWVF meets the first prong of the associational standing test.

With respect to the second prong, the subject matter of the proceeding appears to be generally within the LWVF's general scope of interest and activity. LWVF is an association formed to encourage participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Recently, LWVF launched an affordable energy initiative to educate citizens and LWVF's members about the potential to reduce utility bills, including through conservation, and to increase the affordability of solar energy to mitigate fossil fuel generation, for which recovery is sought in this rate case. An electric utility's rates and rate structure impact all customers, including those that employ energy alternatives and/or conservation measures. Thus, I find that LWVF meets the second prong of the associational standing test.

As for the third prong, LWVF seeks intervention in this docket to represent the interests of its members before the Commission in this proceeding. A trade or professional association has standing to participate in an administrative proceeding, even though it is acting solely as the representative of its members. Florida Home Builders, 412 So. 2d at 353. As stated above, LWVF members will be substantially affected by this Commission's determination in this proceeding. Thus, I find the relief requested by LWVF is of a type appropriate for an association to obtain on behalf of its members.

Because LWVF meets the two-prong standing test established in Agrico as well as the three-prong associational standing test established in Florida Home Builders, LWVF's petition for intervention shall be granted. Pursuant to Chapter 120, F.S., LWVF may offer testimony and provide evidence as to whether the rates, rate-structure, and charges proposed by Gulf are fair, just and reasonable. Notwithstanding the granting of intervention, however, I remind the parties that issues shall be limited to those appropriate to the scope of an electric rate case proceeding. While issue development is an ongoing process, all issues and testimony should be germane to this rate case proceeding.¹ Disagreement as to the inclusion, scope or wording of particular issues will ultimately be resolved at the Prehearing Conference.

¹ Order Nos. PSC-15-0540-PCO-EI, issued November 20, 2016, and PSC-15-0546-PCO-EI, issued November 24, 2016, in Docket No. 150196-EI, In Re: Petition for determination of need for Okeechobee Clean Energy Center Unit 1, by Florida Power & Light Company; and Order No. PCS-14-0355-PCO-EI, issued July 11, 2014, In Re: Environmental cost recovery clause.

Pursuant to Rule 25-22.039, F.A.C., LWVF takes the case as it finds it.

Based on the foregoing, it is

ORDERED by Commissioner Jimmy Patronis, as Prehearing Officer, that the Petition to Intervene filed by The League of Women Voters of Florida, Inc. is hereby granted as set forth in the body of this Order. It is further

ORDERED that the issues and testimony shall be limited to those appropriate in scope and germane to an electric rate case proceeding. It is further

ORDERED that all parties to this proceeding shall furnish copies of all testimony, exhibits, pleadings and other documents which may hereinafter be filed in this proceeding to:

The League of Women Voters of Florida, Inc.
540 Beverly Court
Tallahassee, FL 32301
Telephone: (850) 224-2545

Bradley Marshall, Esq.
Alisa Coe, Esq.
Earthjustice
111 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Telephone: (850) 681-0031
Fax: (850) 681-0020
Email: bmarshall@earthjustice.org
acoe@earthjustice.org

By ORDER of Commissioner Jimmy Patronis, as Prehearing Officer, this 30th day
of December, 2016.


JIMMY PATRONIS
Commissioner and Prehearing Officer
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
(850) 413-6770
www.floridapsc.com

Copies furnished: A copy of this document is provided to the parties of record at the time of issuance and, if applicable, interested persons.

NOTICE OF FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OR JUDICIAL REVIEW

The Florida Public Service Commission is required by Section 120.569(1), Florida Statutes, to notify parties of any administrative hearing or judicial review of Commission orders that is available under Sections 120.57 or 120.68, Florida Statutes, as well as the procedures and time limits that apply. This notice should not be construed to mean all requests for an administrative hearing or judicial review will be granted or result in the relief sought.

Mediation may be available on a case-by-case basis. If mediation is conducted, it does not affect a substantially interested person's right to a hearing.

Any party adversely affected by this order, which is preliminary, procedural or intermediate in nature, may request: (1) reconsideration within 10 days pursuant to Rule 25-22.0376, Florida Administrative Code; or (2) judicial review by the Florida Supreme Court, in the case of an electric, gas or telephone utility, or the First District Court of Appeal, in the case of a water or wastewater utility. A motion for reconsideration shall be filed with the Office of Commission Clerk, in the form prescribed by Rule 25-22.0376, Florida Administrative Code. Judicial review of a preliminary, procedural or intermediate ruling or order is available if review of the final action will not provide an adequate remedy. Such review may be requested from the appropriate court, as described above, pursuant to Rule 9.100, Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure.