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Schumer wants federal commission to reverse decision that could raise local electric rates 10%

by Ray Fashona

POUGHKEEPSIE – Calling an impending hike in electric rates “insanity,” U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer said he would oppose the federally ordered increase “with every bone in my body.”

Speaking in front of Poughkeepsie City Hall last week, New York’s senior senator called the move by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) “a dumb, dumb, dumb idea.”

FERC in August approved the creation a capacity zone in Dutchess County – and elsewhere throughout the mid-Hudson Valley – in order to lure new power generators. The idea was originally proposed by the New York Independent System Operators, which runs New York’s transmission network. After a rehearing in January, the commission OK’d the zone again. It is set to take effect May 1.

What it will mean to consumers, Schumer said, is an increase of between 5 and 10 percent in electric rates.

After battling a particularly brutal winter and a new county-imposed 3.75 percent sales tax on home energy that went into effect March 1, Dutchess residents cannot bear the burden of another 10 percent jump in electricity, Schumer said.

On its website, Central Hudson acknowledges that because of the unusually cold winter, many area residents saw higher-than-normal utility bills. Usage of both natural gas and electricity jumped considerably (natural gas consumption in January was up 25 percent over last year), Central Hudson said, driving up prices as supplies dwindled. “Market supply charges for natural gas rose by 66 percent as a result of higher usage,” according to the utility, “while the total price of delivery

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Common Core rollout concerns reach high level

Local educators address roll back of implementation

by Danielle Fried



Chris Hopper, a 6th grade math teacher, helps students at LaGrange Middle School to understand a project during class. Math is one of the key areas emphasized in the Common Core curriculum. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

If there is agreement about anything in education today, it’s this: The rollout of the Common Core State Standards in 2011 has been rushed.

The New York State Education Department (SED) acknowledges that fact, and the Board of Regents, in its February report, issued 19 points-of-change to the implementation of the Common Core. Most notably, the Board of Regents has delayed full implementation of the Common Core by five years, from 2017 to 2022.

“Changing that to five years out is allowing people a certain exhale,” said Cora Stempel, assistant superintendent for instruction and personnel in the Hyde Park Central School District. “At the same time, that doesn’t mean that we have less concern around the need to align the curriculum with those standards and move forward.”

Others don’t see much change at all. Marvin Kreps, director of curriculum and instruction for the Rhinebeck Central School District, said, “I would suggest that they have not gone far enough in addressing [concerns voiced by parents and educators]. They changed very little of substance.”

The delay in full implementation means students’ mastery of Common Core-based exams will not be a basis for graduation until 2022. This date is 12 years from the rollout, giving students access to Common Core-aligned curricula from the start of their education.

New York State’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards came after President Barack Obama’s Race To The Top (RTTT) competitive grant program was announced in 2009. Under RTTT, states would be awarded certain monies for implementing educational changes, such as data-based teacher evaluation and adoption of the Common Core. The newly developed standards aim to make all students “college and career ready,” and emphasize language and math skills.

Since the rollout, many individuals have spoken out about the undue stress put on educators and students to adapt to the change and be accountable for successful implementation in a two-year span. RTTT issued a timeline for schools to show evidence of participation, partly explaining the rushed implementation.

Accountability concerns extend to students and educators. Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) means 20 percent of a teacher’s evaluation is based on student scores on state assessments.

While the Regents offer more time for students to adjust to the new standards, the APPR process remains. However, the Board report does allow teachers who face disciplinary action based on student assessments from the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014

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Power line implications worry farmers

by Danielle Fried

Editor’s note: This story is one in a series focusing on the current impacts of the high-voltage power lines proposed to relieve an identified transmission bottleneck between Leeds and Pleasant Valley.

Mary Jane McFarland and Greg Quinn each have something to protect. For McFarland, it’s her two young children. For Quinn, it’s “the next big thing.” Both are waiting to know, literally, where to go next.

Both have farms in the path of proposed high-voltage power lines.

The lines have been proposed by three developers to relieve an identified transmission bottleneck between Leeds and Pleasant Valley.

Developers are in the process of modifying their proposals to try and stay within existing rights-of-way so land and homes will not be taken by eminent domain. However, businesses and landowners in the path of the proposed power lines can’t move forward until a project is approved by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The process can take several years to complete.

Quinn is a currant farmer in Clinton Corners. He sells several products through his website, which reads: “The next big thing isn’t big at all. Tiny black currants. Big benefits.” Quinn says currants are “the real deal” when it comes to super foods.

While products labeled currants can be found in stores, small print on the packaging identifies the fruit as “Zante currants” which, according to Quinn, are actually a kind of raisin originating from the Greek island Zakynthos. Quinn is the only person in the nation who sells the “real thing.”

For now, Quinn is farming a Swedish variety of currants imported from Canada. After years of effort to lift a ban on currant farming, build relationships with cutting-edge currant growers in Poland, and waiting out the three-year quarantine required to bring a new plant into the country, Quinn was set to replace his plants with disease-resistant varieties yielding twice the fruit.

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Mary Jane McFarland leads one of her horses in an exercise walk on her farm in Pleasant Valley. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

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