



# Electric rate relief bill signed

Governor finally OKs \$1 billion deal

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DuQUOIN — Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Tuesday signed a \$1 billion electric rate relief package into law that means Ameren and ComEd customers across Illinois soon will get refunds in the mail.

But in a signing ceremony at the DuQuoin State Fair in Southern Illinois, Blagojevich said the plan negotiated by lawmakers isn't perfect.

"A billion dollars in rate relief for people is not as good as \$2 billion in rate relief for people, but it's a heck of a lot better than no dollars," he said. "It's a step further; but I don't think it goes far enough."

The plan guarantees that Ameren will begin sending refund checks to its customers in about two weeks, spokesman Shelley Epstein said.

The legislation comes eight months after Ameren and ComEd customers were hit with rate hikes at the beginning of the year.

That sparked controversy as residents in Central and Southern Illinois hit particularly hard by higher power bills cried out to their lawmakers for help.

"They were sending their bills in, and they were calling," said state Rep. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth. "And they were justifiably upset."

Though most of the billion-dollar tab in the settlement was paid for by energy giant Exelon, Epstein said Ameren has felt damage to its reputation and will have to work to restore faith.

"The increases were profound and were hard on our customers and hard on our company," Epstein said.

State Sen. Gary Forby, D-Benton, who shepherded the legislation through the General Assembly and was one of its most vocal supporters there, said he was "tickled to death."

"It's been a long time coming," he said. "My district has people that's on fixed incomes. They don't have the money."

Blagojevich's criticisms of the legislation are coupled with a chorus of mostly Republican lawmakers who decried the final settlement, saying officials could have squeezed more money from the utility companies.

"To really trumpet that as the best we could do, that's really hard to swallow," said state Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville.

But the settlement's key negotiators, Democratic lawmakers and Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office have defended the final terms as far better than what the companies originally offered.

"I truly believe it was the best that could be negotiated given the conditions that we faced," said state Rep. Bob Flider, D-Mount Zion.

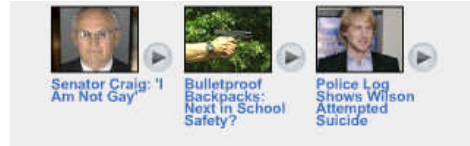
Blagojevich spent nearly a month reviewing the final deal after lawmakers approved it.

"You've got to beware when these big companies are pressing you to sign on the dotted line before you've had the chance to look and study a complicated issue like this," he said.

The governor, who was often criticized for being absent during relief negotiations between utility representatives and legislative leaders, said he knew the system utilities previously used to buy electricity could result in high rates.



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"I was, in the words of a Barbara Mandrell song, 'country before it was cool,'" Blagojevich said. "I saw this coming."

To replace the former system, the settlement creates a new state agency that will oversee how utilities buy power — a key factor in determining electric rates. But critics of the new agency say that oversight won't change the free market.

If market electricity prices go up, consumers could have to pay for it. Supporters hope that the agency will at least slow future increases.

"Maybe it won't," Eddy said. "And there's no guarantees."

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#### What to expect

Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Tuesday signed a \$1 billion package to help curb high electric bills.

#### Ameren

According to the utility, Ameren customers can expect:

- A check for at least \$85 in September, followed by at least \$15 more in credits on their bills until the end of 2007. About 40 percent of customers will fit in this category. Others can expect more.
- Customers with all-electric homes can expect about \$400 back this year, starting with a lump-sum check. Officials warned that the \$400 figure could vary widely, given that all-electric customers live in everything from small apartments to large houses.
- Credits would be scaled back for 2008 and 2009, then eliminated.

#### ComEd

According to the utility, average ComEd customers can expect:

- A one-time credit on their October bill for about \$57, though the credit will vary depending on how much power a customer uses.
- A similar average customer would get about a \$7 credit per month for the rest of 2007. It could range from about \$4 to \$13.
- Credits would be scaled back for 2008 and 2009, then eliminated.

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**Esther** wrote on Aug 28, 2007 11:39 PM:  
" Dear Digs and Bob: I'm getting at least \$400 back. Can I have yours if you don't want it? Whiners. "

**Wow !** wrote on Aug 28, 2007 11:13 PM:  
" Governor finally OKs \$1 billion deal. Thats like one buffalo nickel per Illinois dumbocrat. "

**Digs Deeper** wrote on Aug 28, 2007 11:01 PM:  
" Wow what a super relief package, a \$100.00. Oh.... I have to laugh at that one. First Amer-en installed electronic meter readers as soon as rates went up then next it is a rate hike because it costs more, now it's oh yeah we might of over charged you, but hey shut up here's some hush money a lousy hundred bucks at that, now sit down and be a good little citizen, I see them now, sitting back in their lazy chairs having a good laugh on us..... Seems like everyones in line for a pay hike but the citizens... Going broke paying bills, never felt so good..... "

**Bob** wrote on Aug 28, 2007 10:48 PM:  
" I'm glad to hear I'll get a total of \$100 in this rebate from Ameren, that might be 1/7 of what I still owe them. How much did Emil get in his pocket? "

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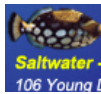
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