

Ameren's rate hike will hurt college students



Zach Vicars

By now most of us have heard about Ameren UE's request for an 18 percent rate hike, as reported in the Feb. 4 edition of the Index. It's foolish, greedy and altogether absurd. Ameren officials claim that they are increasing the rates as a response to customer demand for more reliable — and costly — energy services, but just a slice of critical thinking can detect that such a claim is nothing more than a load of spin put forth by a dubious public relations department.

Although it might be true that customers asked for more reliable energy, it simply cannot be that citizens demanded a rate hike. When was the last time a happy customer called Ameren and said, "Please, I really just have too much disposable income, could you please exploit your monopoly a little bit

more?" Ameren also blames freak ice storms for an increase in maintenance costs, but I'm inclined to believe that a force even more powerful than Mother Nature might be at work here: The law of supply and demand.

That argument just makes more sense. All across Missouri — and the nation, for that matter — people are switching to fluorescent light bulbs, replacing old windows and purchasing more efficient appliances. These small measures add up to big energy savings at year's end. That's good news for us, good news for the environment, but very bad news for Ameren, which profits off our waste and mismanagement of energy.

If we view the situation historically, we'll see that the last time Ameren made a rate hike, it was for this very reason. Ameren President and CEO Gary Rainwater even attested to the company's dire situation before last year's rate hike, saying, "Despite our recently granted increases in Missouri and Illinois ... we believe our 2009 core earnings will be relatively flat compared with 2008 core earnings. We are navigating our company through a global recession, strains on the energy

markets, lower customer usages ... and higher financing costs," according to the St. Louis Business Journal.

So there you have it. Rainwater provided two excuses and two explanations. The excuses were the global recession and the higher financing costs. Just about every person in the United States has had to deal with these factors in the last two years. Ameren's whining about the status of our economy — and, presumably, our weather — is just embarrassing. However, Rainwater admits that the strain on the energy market and lower customer usage (translation: the diligence of American consumers) puts Ameren in a serious crunch. And now, less than a year later, Ameren is in an even worse situation.

They could have made one of two decisions: They could have lowered rates, hoping that usage will increase, or hike rates, relying on their status as a government-protected monopoly. Unfortunately, the choice was too simple for Ameren. An ethical economics major would tell you that Ameren should have lowered its rates and promoted electric products that might increase its business. For instance, Ameren could have offered an incentive for customers

to switch to an infrared furnace, which for a small home provides a much cheaper and more efficient way of heating than an expensive natural gas furnace. Ameren also could have offered rebates for switching to electric stoves, but instead, Ameren decided to take the easy way out and seek a rate hike.

So the real question for Truman students, especially those of us who live off campus, is what should we do? Our first response should be to fight this corporate theft as hard as we can. Although Ameren might already have made up its mind in this case, it's at least worth a try. Our next course of action should be to keep practicing energy efficiency. Turn the lights off when you leave the room. Cover your windows with plastic during the winter months. Wear sweaters inside and knock the thermostat down a few degrees. Invest in more energy efficient laundry machines, toaster ovens or even an off-grid energy source like solar panels. And finally, support more sustainable sources of energy that will put pressure on companies like Ameren, which still draws 80 percent of its power from coal. In a world in which fossil fuel sources are diminishing rapidly, this figure is just unacceptable

from an economic and environmental standpoint. Missouri, and all of the U.S., needs to quickly shift to renewable sources of energy like wind, water and nuclear power if we hope to have any of our beautiful nation — or savings accounts, for that matter — to pass on to our grandchildren.

If Ameren really wants to provide more reliable energy, as executives say, then it needs to find a way to keep rates affordable for customers, instead of hiking them 18 percent, just months after a 9 percent increase. If Ameren really wants to make its corporation viable, then it needs to provide affordable, clean energy to its customers, instead of using its status as a government-regulated monopoly to its advantage. And if Ameren refuses to make these changes, we citizens need to make sure that we no longer rely on an electric company that's stuck in the industrial age of John Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie.

Zach Vicars is a sophomore philosophy/religion and linguistics major from St. Charles, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

How have you tried to be more energy efficient this winter?



"Bundling up at home."

Amelia Bursi
freshman



"Nothing."

Patrick Skeens
freshman



"We turn the heat down when we aren't there."

Mandy Witzel
junior



"Keep my heat at 60 degrees."

Michael Cooper
junior

Students draw professional lines



Jessica Catron

"What is it that the tea baggers say?" That was a direct quote from one of my professors last week. As a well-known member of College Republicans on campus, the leaders of my classes often look to me to defend or debate on behalf of the GOP. I usually oblige, even if I don't necessarily side with the party's official opinion, simply because it needs to be defended. In addition, I also feel an obligation to the professor to participate in discussion. However, during the past two semesters faculty members have referred me to as a "tea bagger" approximately nine times.

For those of you who do not enjoy politics or are similar to my professors and do not understand the issue of being addressed as a "tea bagger," the correct term is "tea-partier." The term is a reference to the Boston Tea Party and taxation without representation in regard to healthcare. The term "tea bagger" is sexually derogatory and often is used by people who find the movement laughable.

While I am sure that my professors simply are ignorant to the correct term and not intending to refer to me in a sexual manner, it is offensive and upsetting. However, I am a proud Republican and the question remains — when is it OK for me to argue with my professor about such a term? I enjoy every class I have and thoroughly respect every professor who teaches them, but I do not enjoy being referred to as a sexual phrase that emotes giggles and snickers while trying to defend my beliefs in front of roughly 20 to 30 of my peers. How do I correct my professors' ignorance without embarrassing them or myself?

This led me to a broader question — why should I have to? Is it really acceptable for my professor to term me anything in front of a class? Where do you draw the line between

personal experiences and academic ones? Even outside of the political realm, many of us worship, shop, drink, eat or watch movies at the same places as our professors. When should these experiences connect us, and when should they just be forgotten?

When I am in the classroom I want to be taken seriously and judged solely on academic pursuits. I have no desire to be graded or judged on what I had in my cart at Hy-Vee during the weekend. This goes along the same guidelines of how your professors would perceive you based on what you wear to class. How would it make you feel if you were to lose participation points for wearing your sweatpants on just an average day of class? I hope against hope that my professors do not and never will judge me this way, but when is it OK for a professor to pass personal judgment?

When is it OK for a student to do the same? Is there ever a time when it is appropriate for me to bring up meeting my professor's wife at Wal-Mart or meeting their children at church in a comment in class? That is something I would never do. I would never force a professor to reveal personal information in such a forum. However, there have been instances in which fellow students in my class have been asked about their parents who met the professor off campus. This is a severe double standard, but I can't point this out without my professor passing a personal judgment on me.

I think there needs to be a line drawn in this regard. There is no handbook for separating personal and academic behavior along this line. However, it is something that I know has made some of my classmates, and myself, uncomfortable. This feeling is detrimental and could possibly harm one's academic performance. But the question remains, where is the line?

Jessica Catron is a junior political science major from Warrenton, Mo.

Ad sparks too much controversy



Molly Skyles

The commercials during the Super Bowl are the sole reason I watch, or kind of but not really watch, the game, and with Snickers commercials featuring Betty White getting tackled and a Dr. Pepper ad with Gene Simmons as Dr. Love, this year's Super Bowl commercial line up was as strong as ever. However, one ad in particular stirred up a bit of controversy.

A few weeks ago I noticed that some of my friends had Facebook statuses against a Focus on the Family ad that was scheduled to run during the big game. The statuses said things like "Jane Smith will focus for 30 seconds on her dog instead of watching the Focus on the Family commercial." Confused as to what this was all about, I looked it up.

Focus on the Family is an organization strongly against abortion under any circumstances. The commercial that ran during the game featured Tim Tebow, former University of Florida quarterback and 2007 Heisman Trophy winner, and his mother, Pam. In 1987, Pam went against doctors' orders when

they told her to abort Tebow, and the commercial tells their story. However, the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, a Pro-Choice America organization, was so outraged by this that they came up with the Facebook status idea to direct people's attention away from the TV during the length of the Focus on the Family ad.

This commercial made pro-lifers cheer and upset many pro-choicers, but regardless of your feelings on abortion, it was, nonetheless, just a commercial. We in America believe strongly in the freedom of speech, and through this commercial, Focus on the Family was simply telling the Tebow's story to further their cause. In fact, at no point during the commercial was the word "abortion" even used, and with Tebow tackling his mother, it was even kind of funny. So all of you intense anti-Focus on the Family people need to take a chill pill.

An average 30-second commercial during the Super Bowl costs \$3 million, according to CNNmoney.com. However, the Focus on the Family ad was bought by unnamed individuals, and they would not disclose how much was paid for their ad. Regardless, if I am paying a few million dollars for a 30-second commercial slot, I expect to be able to do it the way I want and say what I want, and that is just what Focus on the Family did. Despite my own objection to the mission of the organization, it was a tastefully done commercial that explained the success

of Pam Tebow's choice to not abort her son. After paying millions of dollars, I was half expecting the ad to feature someone yelling at me for being pro-choice or believing in gay rights, like the preachers that yell at you on the quad, but I was wrong. It was a commercial that, if I did not previously know the background of the organization, I would have entirely ignored. So once again, calm down, everyone. No commercial is out to get you.

Also, I find it strange that this ad upset so many people when there are other commercials on TV every day that advocate other things not everyone agrees with. When was the last time you heard an uproar regarding an Absolut Vodka or Miller Lite commercial? I know plenty of people who believe that, regardless of age, alcohol is bad for you. It can lead to liver cancer and ruin many different aspects of a person's life. However, those people realize it is just a commercial and get on with their day. Apparently, NARAL organization just couldn't do that.

The Super Bowl is supposed to be a time to sit down with your friends and a bowl of chili to watch football and laugh at silly commercials. By taking a 30-second ad so seriously, we are ruining the fun of it all.

Molly Skyles is a sophomore communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

Freelance jobs create new opportunities for jobless



Alex Boles

Mr. Henry Ford had good intentions. Fordism and the creation of mass production through assembly lines created more jobs than any other "ism," movement or invention I can think of — except maybe the printing press. Those jobs might have been monotonous and boring, but money was in the bank and food was on the table.

Sara Horowitz, founder of the Freelancers Union, recently posted a video to CNN.com detailing how freelance jobs are the new workforce, making up one-third of the force. It's out with the thousands of workers on assembly lines who will be replaced with either

technology or disposable teams — freelancers. Freelancing entails marketing specific skills, services or written work to employers without a long-term commitment.

Companies see freelancing as highly beneficial for them. All they have to do is hire a team and then move them along, Horowitz said. It's a shorter, more flexible, less expensive way to get the job done with the same quality of work. As college students or recent graduates, we're used to working on teams for a common outcome — group projects might suck, but they're getting us ready for the new wave of job placement.

Horowitz said freelancers are responsible for marketing themselves, conceptualizing the job, implementing the job, doing the job and repeating those steps over and over. For example, freelance journalists would start by marketing themselves to a publication, pitch a story idea, write it and submit the article and then repeat. Just recently within the literary field I had to market myself to a publishing

house to become a freelance editor. After a phone interview, I got the job, but I am only a part-time, when-needed employee.

These are skill sets not currently taught in every discipline, especially how to properly market yourself, because we would all like to believe that it won't come down to having to freelance your skills, that we will be a viable asset to a company or organization that will sign us on for more than one assignment. However, freelancing is where the job market is going, and it's better to become acquainted with the market and its benefits now before you go into the workforce.

Soon-to-be graduates, including myself, need to start preparing ourselves by learning how to market our skills toward freelancing or consulting jobs if the time comes when we can't find permanent jobs. I know it sounds pessimistic, and you might have the notion that you will find a job even if it's working the drive-thru at McDonalds, but wake up. Freelancing does not need to carry the negative connotation

everyone seems to be giving it. It's a common whisper that people who freelance are desperate for work. Every rumor has some truth, but freelancing is a better alternative than sitting in your parents' basement waiting for a sign from Mother Earth to point you in the right direction as you play World of Warcraft and videochat with your friends in the "real world." You know, they're probably freelancing, too. It's becoming less of a stereotype of desperation and more of a trend.

With the development of the Freelancers Union in 2003, you can still experience the benefits of working for a full-time company. It is a non-profit, free-to-join organization that assists part-time employees including freelancers, consultants, independent contractors, temporary workers, contingent employees and the self-employed with negotiating insurance rates and providing a social safety net, according to its Web site. Horowitz said the Union understands that society's goals are remaining

the same, even if the workforce is changing and a steady income is scarce. People still need to earn a living, send their kids to college and be protected in time of need. Therefore, the union provides health, dental, retirement and disability plans. They offer a variety of plans as well as product discounts for members and advocacy for fairness in the workforce.

So, yeah, it sucks that you might not be able to find a steady job, but you have options. I wouldn't give up on yourself just yet if you don't have an internship or haven't heard back from any of the places you applied. Maybe change your strategy. Be open to freelancing and start learning how to market yourself and your skill set to different companies. Freelancing is the new black — wear it.

Alex Boles is a senior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.