



Taxpayers tap out trying to get water-rate relief

By Jim Waters

A recent contentious [Public Service Commission hearing](#) in northern Kentucky offers yet another reminder that Jack Conway, attorney general, needs to take seriously his responsibility to protect the commonwealth from federal regulatory onslaughts.

Officials called the Oct. 14 hearing at Thomas More College to gather public input on a request by the Northern Kentucky Water District to flood customers with a whopping 25-percent rate hike.

While some of the \$8 million the increase would raise would go to the water district's equivalent of repairing sagging pipes and leaky faucets, a major chunk would help appease the Environmental Protection Agency and its wacko regulations.

The current political atmosphere leaves little breathing room for big-government types. So, one can understand why ratepayers who took time out of their busy lives to attend this hearing became increasingly irritated as the meeting wore on.

First, they discovered that the "Public" part of the PSC has largely evaporated. Then the water district support for the public dried up. Meanwhile, a representative from the Attorney General's Office showed up, but he didn't speak up for residents, either.

Everyone seems to have a reason for remaining voiceless.

PSC officials say that state statute requires the commission to remain neutral, so it cannot take the side of ratepayers or those seeking an increase.

We'll see about that. The only way to know for sure if the commission "balances" the interest of taxpayers is if they vote to deny – or at least reduce – the rate increase requested.

Ratepayers wanted to talk with the commissioners who receive six-figure salaries, courtesy of taxpayers. However, the statute apparently doesn't allow that, either.

Water district officials treaded water. They need to replace pipes that in some cases are 120 years old. And they face fines and possibly worse if they don't comply with EPA regulations.

Causing most of the fuss: a regulation that requires water utilities nationwide to eliminate "disinfection byproducts" that can remain in treated water.

The "DBP" represents a miniscule amount of chemicals, and the requirement amounts to EPA overkill, chemical engineer Monica Roberts of Crestview Hills told the PSC — or at least she told the microphone that apparently the statutes allow the PSC to provide.

Roberts said it reminded her of a recent stay in Anchorage, Alaska. The city offered such clean water that in a panic to comply with an EPA requirement to "filter our water and clean up the contaminants by 30

percent,” the municipality ended up polluting the water itself with fish remains. Yes, it created something to clean up — all on the taxpayers’ dime.

“I feel like this is where this is going, and I think it just needs to stop,” she said.

Conway could fight it.

But so far, you could make a better backbone out of a banana than he’s shown with regard to pushing against Washington’s unreasonable mandates. That’s as clear as Northern Kentucky’s treated water.

Ron Lovan, Northern Kentucky Water president and chief executive officer, told Kentucky Enquirer-Community Recorder reporter Mike Rutledge that the water contaminants equate [“a grain of salt in an Olympic-sized swimming pool.”](#)

Roberts wants Kentucky via Conway to dive into the battle with 15 states “now joining together to either non-comply or to intercept federal funds so that we can use some of the tax money that we’re actually sending to Washington to offset the federal unfunded mandates that we’re being burdened with.”

Conway won’t even stick a toe in the pool.

“We need an attorney general that’s going to stand up for us,” she said.

Yes we do, Monica.

But the chances of that appear about as likely as Northern Kentucky’s drinking water making anyone sick.

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