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## Volunteer experts impress regulators

After facing what seemed sure to be a huge boost in their electric bills, Arizona residential consumers now will not see a rate increase. Reason: the fast action of the Arizona Utility Intervention Project, a cooperative effort mounted by the Arizona SLC and AARP's Program Department.

One of AARP's newest endeavors, the program utilizes retired volunteers recruited by AARP, all experts in the utilities field. Brought together last spring, they testified before the Arizona Corporation Commission on the Arizona Public Service Company's bid for a \$54.6 million increase.

The main thrust of their argument was that the company's rate request was excessive. The Commission agreed, and gave the power company only a fraction of the amount it requested—specifically, a \$1.6 million increase.

Hoping to duplicate the success in Arizona, volunteers in Georgia are gearing up to battle a rate-base case this spring in which the Georgia Public Service Commission will reconsider the rates charged to different classes of customers.

Explains Georgia SLC vice chairman John Jones, "In the past nine years the residential class has been hit harder than any other whenever there has been a rate increase."

Volunteers in the Arizona and Georgia projects were chosen for their expertise in engineering, law or utilities and have needed very little training, says Lou Keezing, who oversees both projects for AARP's Program Department.

Along the way, the volunteers displayed another crucial quality: They were cool under fire, recalls Arizona SLC member Sonia Pray, who coordinated her state's effort, and, "It takes a special person to testify, because they really badger you on the witness stand."

Plans are under way to start similar utility-intervention programs in Michigan and Oklahoma this spring. ■