

AARP Iowa Launches 2012 Consumer Utility Rate Protection Campaign

Written by Ann Black, AARP

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DES MOINES, Jan. 5 — As the Iowa General Assembly prepares to convene Monday, AARP is launching a utility rate protection campaign to ensure that Iowa ratepayers' voices are heard as legislators start the 2012 legislative session.

Starting today, January 5, AARP is beginning a series of outreach activities including action alerts to AARP members, online advertising, and newspaper and radio ads, all designed to raise awareness of the potential negative impact on consumers of House File 561, a bill that would allow utilities to raise customers' rates up front for a possible nuclear power plant before it is built.

AARP Iowa State Director Kent Sovern explains that AARP is not opposed to nuclear power, but opposes the language of HF 561 that saddles consumers with up-front costs of a possible new facility.

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“At a time when record numbers of Iowa residential customers are struggling to afford their utility bills, it would be unconscionable to force Iowa ratepayers, instead of utility companies and their shareholders, to front the high costs and cancellation risks of a possible plant years before it is built, when the actual costs to build are not known, and when it may or not be completed,” said Sovern.

An AARP survey conducted last year finds that 72 percent of Iowans age 50+ oppose allowing advance ratemaking in Iowa. The survey of 400 Iowa likely voters age 50+ conducted by Selzer & Co., May 23-25, 2011, also asked participants to evaluate three consumer protections that AARP has advocated as amendments to the proposed bill.

More than three-quarters, 79 percent, supported improving the proposal by allowing refunds to customers if the project were canceled. Seventy-five percent said requiring a cost comparison of electricity options for increasing energy service in Iowa before moving forward with a nuclear plant would improve the proposal, and 74 percent said including a limit on how much the utility could charge consumers would make the proposal better. The General Assembly failed to adopt any of these reasonable improvements supported by Iowans, and the Senate amendment filed the last day of session in 2011 failed to address any of these concerns.

“Throughout this debate last year, AARP said our opposition is not to any particular power plant but to the language of HF 561. The legislation must include provisions that maintain Iowa’s consumer protections,” said Sovern. “We were grateful that last year the Senate listened to the thousands of Iowans who voiced opposition to this bill, and we hope by renewing this campaign to start the session, Iowans will again speak up and the Senate will again listen and be a champion for ratepayers.”

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Iowans can make their voices heard and contact their lawmakers by calling a statewide toll-free connection to the State Senate at [1-800-480-4075](tel:1-800-480-4075), or via e-mail online at <http://action.aarp.org/ia>

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