

Statement to City Council – 5/21/24

Good evening, my name is Anu Paruchuri, and I live in Ward 7.

The Council should deny CWLP's request for money.

CWLP has a staggering recent history of noncompliance and poor management. At a minimum, they've had: (1) the fly ash release in 2021; (2) the failure to address coal ash ponds by the federally mandated deadline; and (3) the failure to ensure adequate funds for timely and necessary maintenance, such as the lead pipes, to the point where customers will see their rates increase 74% over two years. Meanwhile, certain Council members have continued to praise CWLP management despite these failings. I watch the meetings almost every week. I see this happening.

Now, CWLP wants \$275,000 for outside counsel, with the decision to sue ultimately made behind closed executive session doors. Citizens of Springfield deserve to know whether a lawsuit will be filed – particularly when this impacts taxpayer money, environmental welfare, and human health.

According to Debbie Williams, the previous rule at issue incentivized direct discharge, and yet CWLP nevertheless chose a different method. Now they are complaining about the consequences of their actions – but trying to blame USEPA and asking that the ratepayers cover the cost of that decision. Is this going to be a situation where we delay and delay and delay until the necessary remedy becomes unduly expensive, just like the lead pipe repairs? Last week, Alderman Williams said, "We continually resist compliance." He is absolutely correct. Look at the ash ponds, where CWLP waited until the compliance deadline to request an extension – further delaying action.

I'm also thinking down the road to 2035, when CWLP must reduce CO2 equivalent emissions by 45%; and 2045, when CWLP must reduce those emissions to zero. I'm thinking of CWLP's request for money to explore converting to natural gas, even though Illinois law would still require zero emissions by 2045. Isn't it better to spend this \$275,000 on something that moves us forward, instead of on stagnant technology that must be phased out in the next couple of decades? Or on outside lawyers trying to find loopholes? It seems CWLP is always looking for a way to kick the can down the road instead of immediately tackling the very real, very serious problems that it faces. And ultimately, who suffers? The citizens.

What exactly is the plan here? Is CWLP going to ask for an exemption from the rule? Or try to get a federal rule overturned? Let's say they succeed. What is the point of fighting rules for fossil fuel power plants when Illinois law – and common sense – are pushing us towards renewable energy? Again – isn't this money better spent on other environmental concerns? As Alderman Williams noted, the ash ponds are in his ward, and for my part, I've heard nothing recently from CWLP or the Council on how that mess is being addressed.

We don't even know why CWLP can't comply with the new rule. Debbie said the rule would require them to convert from indirect to direct discharge, but the rule doesn't expressly require that. So, is it a technical issue? We need more details before handing them this money.

And how will this money be used? Alderman Williams pointed out that if you come to the Council and ask for money, you should be able to articulate what it's going to be used for and when, instead of saying, "Hey, we'd like money set aside just in in case." Indeed, the Council seems to apply this standard all the time to projects in Wards 2 and 3. It's only fair that the same applies to CWLP.

Furthermore, Alderman Carlson asked for a breakdown of the funds to be granted to Juneteenth and other celebrations because he believes the Council should be good stewards. A little accountability – you know, in case someone from his ward asks how the money for those events will be spent. Well, I'm from his ward – and I would like accountability for how CWLP spends our money.

I am speaking to you all as a CWLP ratepayer and an environmental attorney who previously did enforcement work. And to be clear, my opinions today are my own. What I see is stunning incompetence and a complete denial of where we are headed when it comes to energy production. Perhaps CWLP and the Council want to continue burying their heads in a fly ash pile, but once that ash flies off into the atmosphere like it did 2 years ago, they will be forced to face reality – and we, the ratepayers, will likely be paying the monetary and environmental price.

Please deny CWLP's request and vote no on this ordinance.