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Editorial: PUCO being PUCO - The Toledo Blade

THE BLADE EDITORIAL BOARD

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The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio continues to cover for big utilities and corruption. The agency needs a top to bottom overhaul. The fact that politicians aren't demanding and moving to get the agency under control tells you much about the state of politics in Ohio.

The people, the consumers, come last.

It's all well and good to argue and parade on cultural issues to win votes. Once in a while it's good to get down to business.

One of Ohio's top orders of business should be to reform PUCO.

The people have one fairly small organization advocating for them in the utilities mess and corruption associated with House Bill 6. That's the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel. Their work is stymied at every turn, not only by the utilities and their well-heeled lawyers, but by judges who may rule according to the letter of the law but miss the intent of the law.

That's why beefing up the OCC should be something legislators can agree on. Give them more funding and more authority. Give the office subpoena powers. The need for that power became evident once again last week when an administrative law judge killed a request by the office to issue subpoenas.

Compelling testimony is a necessity for the consumers' counsel to investigate the FirstEnergy scandal. PUCO is supposed to look out for consumers. It clearly fails that test. Every year the failing grade gets repeated. Every year PUCO gets a pass from the governor and legislators.

The administrative law judge required testimony by an auditing company at one point employed by FirstEnergy. That testimony may contradict the PUCO approved report of auditors Daymark Energy Advisors. They somehow managed to find "no documented evidence" showing FirstEnergy used earnings from some charges to ratepayers to buy votes in the H.B. 6 saga.

Where did the judge require the testimony? In front of PUCO.

PUCO has as much credibility investigating FirstEnergy as Al Capone would have had investigating mob tax evasion.

The judge denied a credible organization, namely the OCC, the ability to compel testimony via subpoena.

PUCO reform must be at the top of every gubernatorial candidates list. If it's not, they shouldn't be running.

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