

THE BLADE

Editorial: Vote out politicians who won't shake up PUCO

THE BLADE EDITORIAL BOARD

MAR 13, 2022

The shock value can't be summoned anymore regarding the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. They're up to no good, and they're arrogant. PUCO will just keep doing consumers dirty until the people of this state finally say no more.

That will take voting out the politicians who facilitate PUCO.

In the latest twist to their sordid doings the PUCO board voted last week to further stymie investigation of FirstEnergy and the House Bill 6 bribery scandal.

That decision was not unexpected and follows a familiar pattern. The move makes the case stronger for a complete overhaul of the agency. PUCO reform must be a top issue in election campaigns this year. Any politician who thinks the status quo is acceptable must go.

Here's what PUCO claims as its mission: "Our mission is to assure all residential and business consumers access to adequate, safe and reliable utility services at fair prices, while facilitating an environment that provides competitive choices."

That all sounds nifty.

In carrying out that mission, PUCO repeatedly kills every route of inquiry into one of the biggest political scandals in Ohio for decades. And by the way, the biggest rip off of consumers imaginable. Wait a minute, that doesn't sound in accord with the mission. No, it's not.

This time the agency nixed a subpoena for the deposition of an auditor who likely has information on the House Bill 6 scandal. A deposition mandates testimony under oath. The question of the deposition has bounced back and forth for a while. The vote was a decision by the full PUCO board.

The Ohio's Office of Consumers' Counsel wanted the testimony to learn more about the H.B. 6 scandal. The office wanted to depose Oxford Advisers. Oxford worked on a report into surcharges by FirstEnergy. It's long past time for reform of the commission. PUCO must be brought into line with the mission statement it avows.

The first step toward those changes would be the election of the PUCO board.