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Sen. Rodríguez statement on City Council vote to settle EPE rate case

El Paso - Senator José R. Rodríguez (D-El Paso) releases the following response to the El Paso City Council's vote today authorizing legal counsel to settle El Paso Electric's current rate case according to a settlement terms outlined by counsel:

I commend the City of El Paso for diligently advancing settlement terms in El Paso Electric's current rate case that are advantageous to all ratepayers.

Unfortunately, I still have concerns about proposals to increase fees on residential customers who chose to install solar panels on their homes. I acknowledge that eliminating El Paso Electric's original proposal to move solar customers into a new rate category is a positive step. For reasons I articulated to Council and the Public Utility Commission of Texas,** I believe that proposal would have systematically overcharged solar customers.*

Nevertheless, I fear the remaining settlement terms may still disincentivize solar growth in El Paso. As I understood those terms, solar customers would pay an additional \$11 charge on their electric bill that can decline based on how much electricity the customer buys from El Paso Electric. It is my understanding that most solar customers' average monthly savings is less than \$10 a month, so I am concerned this new charge will still eliminate customers' financial incentive to use solar.

Moreover, I understood the proposed settlement terms would only grandfather in customers who installed solar previous to El Paso Electric's rate case filing in August. The number of new solar customers has nearly doubled since then. These new customers may have invested substantial money installing solar,

expecting to recoup that investment in monthly energy savings. Now, their financial calculation is no longer valid. This is unfair. A better result would be to at least extend grandfathering provisions to the date when the PUC finally approves El Paso Electric's new rate regime.

I understand that not all of the solar interveners in the rate case agree with this proposed settlement. I look forward to seeing how the PUC will ultimately decide these remaining issues. I would again urge the PUC to seriously consider the positive contributions residential solar brings to El Paso.

* Letter to City Council, November 18, 2015,

http://interchange.puc.state.tx.us/WebApp/Interchange/Documents/44941_303_873542.PDF

** Letter to PUC, January 22, 2016,

http://interchange.puc.state.tx.us/WebApp/Interchange/Documents/44941_629_879918.PDF

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.