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2 COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC UTILITIES

3 (PGW 20% SENIOR CITIZEN DISCOUNT HEARING)

4 CENTER IN THE PARK, 5818 GERMANTOWN AVENUE

5 FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2003

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9 PRESENT:

10 PEDRO RODRIGUEZ, Chair

11 PATRICIA ALBRIGHT, Co-Chair

12 COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOOD, JR.

13 COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER

14 COUNCILMAN DAVID COHEN

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1 PGW 20% senior discount - 3/21/03
2 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you for coming to
3 this event to Center in the Park. My name is Pedro
4 Rodriguez. I'm the executive director of the Action
5 Alliance for Seniors Citizens of Greater
6 Philadelphia.

7 We have a very serious matter to discuss
8 this afternoon. This is the way it's going to work,
9 with your permission: Pat Albright from the Women's
10 Cultural Center will co-chair the meeting with
11 myself. We are honored with the presence of City
12 Councilman-at-large Wilson Goode, Jr., who chairs
13 the Committee on Public Utilities and Transportation
14 for City Council.

15 Councilman Goode, will you please come
16 to the table.

17 Councilman Goode will make an opening
18 statement to bring you up to date about what has
19 happened with the discussion of the fate of the 20
20 percent gas discount from PGW for senior citizens,
21 and he'll also explain to you what steps lie ahead
22 for this issue.

23 In the meantime, those of you who had
24 called in to testify or signed up to testify, we're
25 going to ask you to come in pairs. Two of you will
come. We're going to call two names at a time. So

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2 that way, we have continuity. You won't have to
3 wait until somebody sits down.

4 When you come and testify, please remain
5 here in case there's a question that needs to be
6 answered by either Councilman Goode or somebody
7 else. We're expecting additional Council members to
8 come in, and Councilman Goode will explain to you
9 why they all are not here now at this moment, among
10 other things. And there's a very good reason. It's
11 the business of the City government. That's the way
12 it happens sometimes.

13 This is a very serious matter that we're
14 really dedicated to seeing it resolved in a way that
15 is satisfactory to our seniors and to our City.
16 Please join me in giving a warm welcome to
17 Councilman Wilson Goode, Jr.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good afternoon. I'm
19 very pleased to be here this afternoon, although I
20 cannot stay to be with you. I want to give an
21 overview of this issue and how City Council has
22 addressed it and is planning to address it.

23 We were actually made aware that PGW and
24 the state wanted to eliminate this discount almost
25 by accident, because we were not consulted, although

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2 City Council created this discount 30 years ago and
3 although the majority of Council members, as we will
4 soon find out, are in favor of keeping this
5 discount.

6 The state legislature through the Gas
7 Choice and Competition Act decided that they would
8 change the process. They decided to empower the
9 Public Utility Commission to make this decision for
10 the City of Philadelphia. But through that Act, it
11 calls for City Council and the City to respond by
12 ordinance. And so the process began actually with a
13 resolution to get feedback from the citizens of
14 Philadelphia, through experts, from PGW and people
15 impacted by this issue on what the City should do.

16 But, essentially, I think the City
17 Council found out very quickly that we were all on
18 the same page, along with seniors and the rest of
19 the citizens of Philadelphia, that we wanted to keep
20 this discount. But this is not our final decision.
21 We no longer have the authority to do so, but we
22 have to make our thoughts known.

23 So we held the first hearing on this
24 resolution on February 20th. We held another
25 hearing on this resolution yesterday, March 20th,

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2 and we're taking more feedback today.

3 What is said here today within this
4 meeting will become part of the formal transcript
5 and record in terms of what will go into decisions
6 made on this resolution.

7 Essentially, we will hold continued
8 meetings until this issue is resolved. But two
9 things will happen. We will hold continued hearings
10 on this resolution to give people feedback across
11 the City, but also on April 1st at 10:00 a.m. in
12 Room 696, City Council will consider two bills,
13 because we have to respond to this issue by
14 ordinance. We actually have to pass the law that
15 puts the senior citizen discount back as a program
16 to let the Public Utility Commission know that by
17 law, City Council has decided that the program
18 stays. Public Utility Commission can still overrule
19 us, but we will take that action beginning April
20 1st.

21 So we invite you to make your comments
22 known here today to become part of the formal record
23 on a resolution. We also invite you to be there on
24 April 1st so you can be part of the formal record on
25 the two bills. The two bills are actually what will

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2 become law, which is what is needed for the Public
3 Utility Commission to respond to.

4 To explain what's going on today, as it
5 can be very complicated in terms of Council
6 business, we are in the middle of budget hearings.
7 We're in the middle of other committee hearings. We
8 have stated meetings we have once a week. It is
9 also a political season. And none of us will put
10 our work before politics, but for a number of
11 different reasons, the hearing this morning in the
12 Commerce and Economic Development Committee got
13 started late, and so on a few different bills, one
14 of which is a very important bill done by Councilman
15 Ortiz, is actually going to be a great effort for
16 the City.

17 But because Councilman Ortiz and I and
18 some others were delayed getting to that hearing
19 this morning, the portion of the hearing that deals
20 with Councilman Ortiz's bill is still being heard
21 now. And the stenographer that was supposed to be
22 here this afternoon is still there. We expect that
23 hearing to probably continue throughout the
24 afternoon, which is why I have to return to that
25 hearing. And as much as I tried to leave my vote in

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2 favor of those bills, because I support that issue
3 being discussed there as well, I have to get back to
4 maintain a quorum, because we can't actually even
5 move into a meeting where votes can be accepted
6 unless we have enough members of the committee
7 there.

8 So at different points, members of the
9 Transportation and Public Utilities Committee and
10 members of Council will come to this meeting, and
11 other members will have to return to the other
12 hearing to make sure we maintain a quorum there.
13 But everything that is said here, if a stenographer
14 arrives, whether it's the stenographer that is there
15 or another stenographer or whether it's done by tape
16 recorder or transcribed in some other way, it will
17 be part of the formal record.

18 But I leave you in very good hands here
19 with Pedro Rodriguez and Pat Albright, and also Ray
20 Alvarez from Councilman Ortiz's office is here to
21 help manage the witness list as well.

22 So I thank you for coming. This is
23 actually a great thing that we are doing by actually
24 taking this legislative process into the
25 neighborhoods. I'm very proud to be a part of that,

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2 but it does become a conflict when you have to
3 maintain a quorum down at City Hall while you're
4 also trying to do something in neighborhoods.

5 So I thank you for coming, and this is
6 very much a part of what City Council is trying to
7 do to deal with this issue. Thank you very much.

8 MR. RODRIGUEZ: And we have received
9 notice that several members of Council are on their
10 way to this meeting this afternoon.

11 I also would like to acknowledge and
12 invite to sit at the table Mr. Tim Carney, who works
13 for Councilman David Cohen, who is a great supporter
14 of this effort.

15 So, Tim, would you please sit down.

16 And Phil Bertocci, who heads Community
17 Legal Services Utility Unit, he's our expert on gas
18 and utility issues, and he will be as a resource
19 available to us for any type of questions, any
20 technical question you might have, any question
21 regarding billings and all the policies of PGW. He
22 knows more than anybody else in this town about PGW
23 and how that's done.

24 At this point, I'd like to invite Judy
25 Preston and Phoebe Jones to come and be ready to

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2 testify.

3 MS. PRESTON: I guess I should be glad
4 I'm first. That way I don't have to be scared the
5 whole time.

6 I'm not 65 yet, but I want to protect my
7 interests for the future. I will be 65 in about
8 three years. My name is Judith Preston. I live
9 right over here on East Coulter Street. And this
10 year I became very concerned about my bills because
11 each month has gotten higher. And in January, it
12 was 217.77. At the end of January, it was 305.10.
13 In March, it was 391.27 and in -- let's see. For
14 April 1st, it's \$346.86. So so far this year, it's
15 \$1,261 just this year. Last year it was \$1,248.13
16 for the whole year.

17 And so in 2002 -- this year there's
18 \$795.14 more this year than there was last year at
19 this time.

20 Now, the only reason I'm sharing all
21 that with you is because I see that it's getting
22 higher and higher, with no caps. And my income
23 presently is capped. I am retired, and my income is
24 such that there's no opportunity to get the extra
25 that we need. So maybe in the future I'm going to

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2 be one of those who is going to have to decide
3 between being warm or eating my food.

4 So thank you very much.

5 MS. JONES SCHELLENBERG: Hi. My name is
6 Phoebe Jones Schellenberg. First I want to thank
7 Pat Albright and Pedro Rodriguez for their hard work
8 in setting this up.

9 I'm the coordinator of the Crossroads
10 Women's Center in Maplewood Mall in Germantown.
11 It's just a few blocks from here, and it's just a
12 block from the corner of Germantown and Cheltenham
13 Avenue, which was once referred to by a University
14 of Pennsylvania professor as ground zero. Now, this
15 was long before 9/11. They called it ground zero,
16 and it meant rock bottom.

17 And many of the women who come to our
18 center and many of us who work out of our center
19 have hit rock bottom. We're either trying to
20 survive on a fixed income or working two or three or
21 more part-time jobs, raising children, and this is
22 often grandmothers who are raising children. We're
23 raising our children's children because welfare
24 reform has forced the mothers out to low-waged work.
25 Many are caring for elderly dependents.

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2 We really cannot take any more hits.

3 And the phasing out of the senior citizen discount
4 is a blow. It will hit women, particularly women of
5 color, the hardest.

6 The inequalities that exist in pay
7 between women and men and between women of color and
8 white men worsens as women get older. Women make up
9 the majority of poor seniors due, in large part, to
10 this pay gap, as well as to the lack of pay for the
11 work of raising children and caring for people.

12 Women's pensions are either non-existent
13 or much lower than men's. And older women have to
14 survive on less than half of what men have to
15 survive on. And when we're talking about women of
16 color, the statistics are even worse.

17 The plan to phase out the senior citizen
18 discount or make it means tested is just one more
19 blow to those on the bottom at ground zero.

20 The local post office just closed. PGW
21 has already cut back on the days our local gas
22 company's service center is open. Women are forced
23 to spend more and more of our day just taking care
24 of the essentials of life. Are we going to be
25 reduced or get close to the conditions that women in

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2 the Third World have to face, spending hours
3 fetching fuel and water? Is that where we're
4 headed?

5 As resources are drained from our
6 communities to fund a war we don't want, life in our
7 neighborhoods are getting more and more difficult.

8 We're asking City Council to please
9 reign in PGW. You have the power. Please save our
10 senior citizen discount. Thank you.

11 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you very much. We
12 also ask you if you have written testimony, to
13 please leave it with us, because we're going to turn
14 that over to the City Council to be part of the
15 official records.

16 Mary Tabs and Nancy Carroll.

17 MS. CARROLL: My name is Nancy Carroll.
18 I'm a grandmother, a great grandmother and I'm just
19 turning -- I'm just a senior citizen. I'm one of
20 the new senior citizens that they're talking about.

21 I'm wondering, on fixed income -- of
22 course I'm on fixed income -- I'm wondering how can
23 I make it if they cut off the money that they're
24 going to give us. Since I am a new senior citizen,
25 that means that I'll be left out from the discount

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2 that the other seniors, older seniors, are getting.
3 I won't be one of those. I want to be one of those.
4 I want to be of the ones that gets the discount,
5 because I need it.
6 I have six grandchildren and one great
7 grand that I'm trying to raise, and I need
8 everything I can get and more.
9 Is there any questions?
10 (No response.)
11 MS. CARROLL: Thank you.
12 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.
13 Is Mary here?
14 (No response.)
15 MR. RODRIGUEZ: How about Corliss Gray
16 and Mildred Blackwell?
17 (No response.)
18 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Fabricia Rodriguez,
19 Patricia Lagren?
20 By the way, if you want to testify, just
21 give us your name.
22 John Hogan and Kathy Brown?
23 (No response.)
24 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Is Juanita Britt here?
25 (No response.)

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2 MR. RODRIGUEZ: How about Corey
3 Robinson? John Hogan?

4 MR. HOGAN: Thank you. My name is John
5 Hogan. I'm a wanna-be senior who lives in Mount
6 Airy. I'm also a green party candidate for City
7 Council-at-Large, and I'm here to speak in support
8 of keeping PGW's senior discount.

9 One of the advantages of having publicly
10 owned utilities is that we can build into its
11 operation some idea of the kind of community we want
12 to have. The senior discount is one example of how
13 we've done that in Philadelphia, pitching in
14 collectively to help take care of a particularly
15 vulnerable group of our neighbors. That we've
16 accepted that arrangement for 30 years should make
17 us proud. Eliminating it would be a retreat for
18 those shared values.

19 Part of the proposal is means testing
20 the discount to make sure that only the truly needy
21 enjoy it. Please consider not only the principles
22 behind means testing, but the predictable efforts.
23 Making the discount a benefit for which you have to
24 prove your eligibility will actually discourage even
25 eligible people from applying for it. Not only

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2 because of the difficulties involved in proving
3 one's status, but also because of the stigma that is
4 still regrettably attached to being poor and
5 accepting help.

6 Thank you.

7 MR. ROBINSON: Good afternoon, everyone.
8 My name is Corey Robinson. I'm assistant director
9 for the Youth Web Community Technology Center
10 located at 5700 North Broad street.

11 We started out as an after-school
12 program, but in the last two years, we've ventured
13 to offering a Dell computer class. And in that Dell
14 computer class is mainly seniors.

15 We have a community organizer, who was
16 Kathy Brown. She's not here right now, family
17 illness. But she's our community organizer and she
18 helps our seniors with lie heat, gas assistance,
19 different programs like that. So in the last two
20 years, I'll say we served over 150 seniors. So
21 those seniors I've greatly seen impacted. They
22 really need this senior discount, the 20 percent.

23 From a personal note, I just moved out
24 of my parents' house in December. I've had three
25 gas bills. I moved over to School House Lane. I've

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2 had three gas bills. In that three months my gas
3 bills have been \$1500. I being young, working, I
4 can afford it. However, I'm willing to take the hit
5 and I'll pay my gas bills so that the seniors can
6 receive their discount.

7 QUESTIONER: I have a question. The
8 seniors that run the youth center -- I mean, that
9 come and service the youth center, I should say, do
10 you know offhand in terms of the income levels month
11 ending? Can you remember what you deal with on
12 average?

13 MR. ROBINSON: Well, since our program
14 is under the Mayor's office of community service,
15 they have to be both, below the poverty line, and we
16 follow City Council guidelines for that.

17 QUESTIONER: Thank you.

18 MR. PAULMIER: Good afternoon. I think
19 this is a great opportunity. My name is Greg
20 Paulmier. I'm the ward leader of the 12th Ward in
21 Germantown, the democratic ward leader of the 12th
22 Ward in Germantown. And I think it's great. I want
23 to thank City Council and the Women's Project that
24 put this together, because I think this is an
25 important opportunity for us as a community to have

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2 a say in what happens in our government and what
3 happens to one of our most precious commodities and
4 one of our public utilities, still public, the
5 Philadelphia Gas Works.

6 And I want to first thank them for
7 bringing this forum to this, the Crossroads Women's
8 Project, for bringing this forum here, because I
9 think we as a community need to be more involved in
10 decision-making that our government and that our gas
11 company makes. Because, in essence, we want to be
12 more in terms of governance, self-governance of
13 ourselves.

14 This is where we get a chance to
15 participate, where we're given an opportunity to
16 communicate to our government what direction we want
17 them to take. Too often we as a community are being
18 told which direction we're going in. Here we have
19 an opportunity as residents in our very own
20 community, in our very own neighborhood, in our very
21 own senior citizens facility, next to our very own
22 senior citizens housing facility, we have a great
23 opportunity.

24 I hope everyone will take an opportunity
25 to come up here. I think, Mary, I think you said it

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2 all. When you said that you raise our gas rates by
3 taking away our discount, you're raising our gas
4 rates. By raising our gas rates, you're taking food
5 out of our children's mouths, out of our mouths, and
6 that's not something that we're going to stand for.

7 So I stand in solidarity with all of
8 those that are here today and those that aren't here
9 and weren't able to be here that I am for the senior
10 citizen discount, and I actually think -- I'll take
11 it a step further. I think we should be talking
12 about further discounts for our seniors, the anchors
13 of this community.

14 As the ward leader in Germantown, our
15 senior citizens are the last ones to move out.
16 They're the ones that are neighbors that I myself
17 can rely on to watch over my children, to be there
18 to vote on election day. We are the ones that need
19 to nurture our senior citizens, our government and
20 we ourselves.

21 So I ask you to come forward and take
22 this opportunity to communicate how you feel about
23 this important discount and how it affects you. And
24 I think if we let them take away this discount,
25 they'll then go after the parts and labor program

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2 and they'll say they'll no longer give us the parts
3 and labor program for the 45 or 50 dollars that we
4 get it for. And then all the sudden, we'll have
5 people not to fix our heater. Not only will we not
6 be able to afford the gas utility, but we won't have
7 the utility to come in and repair our heater and we
8 won't have heat at all.

9 So I think we have to stop it in the
10 beginning. We have to say no. We want to continue
11 with the senior citizens discount. We want the gas
12 company to be ran more efficiently so that it
13 doesn't get into the dire straits that it's gotten
14 into as a result of mismanagement, of upper
15 management not running an efficient operation. But
16 we need to make sure that we keep the discount as it
17 is.

18 So I stand with you and I ask you to ask
19 for more. Don't just say it's okay, but let's take
20 it a step further. Let's say that not only do we
21 want the senior citizen discount to stay, but we
22 want the senior citizen discount to increase as time
23 goes on, because, in essence, as the utility gets
24 more expensive, the discount doesn't make as much
25 sense, it doesn't actually save us what it could

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2 save us. So, in essence, we need it to increase.

3 I think we go the opposite way and I
4 think there's less chance they'll take it away from
5 us. Okay? I encourage everyone to come forward.
6 Let's encourage our City Council people to continue
7 to have hearings like this about all matters that
8 have to do with our tax dollars and what direction
9 our city and state goes in.

10 So I encourage you to embrace this
11 opportunity. I think it's a great opportunity.

12 Again, my hat goes off to the Women's
13 Crossroad Project for pulling this off, for Council
14 for sponsoring it, and I hope all of you will stand
15 and be a part of this testimony, because I think
16 it's important to show our city officials -- we're
17 60 days away from an election. It's terribly
18 important for us now to stand up and not just wait
19 for election day to vote, but to vote in front of
20 this microphone and let them hear loud and clear
21 that each of every one of us believes this senior
22 citizen discount is an important step in the
23 direction toward nurturing the pedestals, the
24 foundation of our community.

25 So with that, I thank you, and I ask to

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2 you please rise and come up and speak at this
3 microphone, be a part of this, because it's very
4 important that you be heard today.

5 Thanks a lot.

6 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Will Vivian Schatz and
7 June Krebs please come up. I also would like to
8 acknowledge the arrival and the presence Steve Bond
9 from the office of City Councilwoman Donna Reed
10 Miller. Welcome.

11 MS. SCHATZ: I'm here to urge that the
12 senior citizen discount be kept. If it's not
13 broken -- I'm Vivian Schatz. Thank you.

14 If it's not broken, don't fix it. A
15 vast majority of housing units in Philadelphia use
16 natural gas for heating. The majority of these
17 customers are women and minorities. And up to now,
18 for 30 years, gas customers have been able to
19 receive a 20 percent senior citizen discount when
20 they reach 65 years old. This discount has enabled
21 seniors to stay in their own homes and stay warm
22 during the kind of winters such as the one we have
23 just experienced.

24 It would be an extreme hardship for the
25 83,000 seniors who currently receive the discount if

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2 a 20 percent discount were eliminated, and it would
3 be a continuing hardship for all the seniors who
4 would become eligible for the 20 percent discount if
5 it were not continued.

6 Thank you.

7 MS. KREBS: I'm June Krebs, a senior
8 citizen. I'm 72, so it applies to me, and I've
9 lived in Mount Airy for over 30 years, and I'd like
10 to stay here.

11 I'd like to quote from the Constitution
12 of the United States. This is its preamble. "We,
13 the people of the United States, in order to form a
14 more perfect union, establish justice, ensure
15 domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense
16 and promote the general welfare."

17 Will it serve these goals to force
18 seniors to leave their homes? They usually can't
19 get employment because of job age requirements and
20 also because of their poor health.

21 In California, automatic discounts are
22 given for the poor, and the poor is established so
23 that they leave the poor provided for. Why can't we
24 do it if California can do it?

25 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Next we have Mark

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2 DeBeary, followed by Tonya Wenger. Is Tonya here?

3 MR. DeBEARY: Hi. I'm Mark DeBeary and
4 I'm a committee person in the 22nd Ward, which is
5 East Mount Airy, and today I'm here because I want
6 to speak for our mother.

7 My mother, she just turned 65 years old.
8 My mother is in the hospital right now, and what I'm
9 going to describe to all of you is probably what a
10 lot of you have already gone through or a lot of
11 things that have happened in your life.

12 But she's been in and out of the
13 hospitals, has a whole bunch of medications that she
14 has to take, and yet she has to keep her home
15 heated. Her bill just last month was \$800. I
16 forgot to turn it down because she was in the
17 hospital.

18 What has happened here is, senior
19 citizens are probably the largest homeowners in the
20 City of Philadelphia, to be quite honest with you.
21 30 years ago when you guys had that discount, there
22 weren't a whole lot of you there, so they were able
23 to give you that discount. Being that we're in an
24 economic crisis, we have a war that's going on,
25 which I'm 100 percent against, that war that's going

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2 on has a lot to do with the oil prices, the whole
3 nine yards, but what's happening is is that the
4 economy is going down.

5 PGW, like any good operating business,
6 is trying to cut costs where they can increase their
7 revenues. They're trying to get it from the seniors
8 now. I say no. I say that they have to do
9 something else in order for them to get those
10 revenues.

11 My mother cannot afford to pay more for
12 her gas, because she's going to start asking me for
13 some dollars to help her to do that, and I have my
14 own gas bill to pay.

15 So I urge each and every one of you to
16 call up your councilpersons, to call up the mayor,
17 to call up your Congress people, call up everyone
18 and raise a little bit of you know what.

19 I appreciate the time and I hope it gets
20 defeated. Thank you very much for the time.

21 MS. WENGER: My name is Tonya Wenger.
22 I'm here today to represent the support and concern
23 of young people about this proposed cut.

24 Some people might ask and have asked me
25 why would someone your age be concerned about this

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2 issue. First of all, I'm part of a family, just as
3 the committee man said just a moment ago. A family
4 that has cared for me my whole life, even up to
5 today in many ways. And also my family consists of
6 my two parents, who are now becoming senior
7 citizens.

8 At this point, they're healthy and doing
9 well on their own; however, at some point in the
10 future, they will most likely need more of the
11 support of their children and other family. If I'm
12 the one caring for them, as many women are doing
13 now, often facing great economic hardship to do so,
14 I will want to be sure that benefits such as the
15 discount for seniors on their gas bill would be in
16 place.

17 Second of all, if all goes well, I will
18 be a senior one day. If we don't support efforts
19 like this now, what will it be like in the prime
20 time of my life?

21 Thanks.

22 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Mildred Blackwell and
23 Mary Kalyna.

24 At this point, I'd like to acknowledge
25 the arrival and the presence of the Honorable donna

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2 Reed Miller from City Council.

3 MS. BLACKWELL: I'm Mildred Blackwell, a
4 senior. Good afternoon. I would like a few true
5 answers. Why do the seniors have to suffer for the
6 PGW executives' high living? And, for instance, why
7 wasn't the executives reprimanded, like pay back,
8 serve time in prison? No. Seniors are paying. It
9 is sad. It's sad.

10 PGW executives again, who absorbs the
11 mismanaged funds for the big-time computer system
12 that never worked? Again, the seniors.

13 PGW cut back and closed some of their
14 offices. That's very bad for seniors.

15 We do not have money to pay the gas now.
16 You have to pay for sending your payments in. For
17 instance, at pay stations or money orders and your
18 postage. And everyone does not have a checking
19 account, and you still pay postage to send that
20 check in.

21 And the handicapped seniors travel to
22 find an office that's open or a pay station. It's
23 sad. I'm frightened.

24 And PGW's service is terrible. It's
25 terrible. I know things change with years, but PGW

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2 started an insurance plan. Okay? At first they
3 came out right away so you wouldn't get hypothermia
4 or freeze to death. Now the tape comes on and it
5 puts you on hold for two or three hours, and then
6 when someone do come on the line, they tell you it
7 may be two or three days before they can get out to
8 your house. But you have paid your insurance. By
9 the time they get there, you have frozen to death.
10 Then, Oh, that is terrible. Too late. Okay?

11 And we're just uptight as seniors. We
12 have enough things on us as is. And a question, why
13 are you paying insurance if you can't get any
14 consideration?

15 And I plead to the entire City Council
16 for your concern and help. Please. Please. If we
17 go down, please go down with us fighting.

18 Thank you kindly.

19 MS. KALYNA: Thank you. My name is Mary
20 Kalyna and I'm speaking today on behalf of When
21 Visible, which is women with visible and invisible
22 disabilities. We're one of the grass roots
23 organizations that are based at the Crossroad
24 Women's Center in Maplewood Mall. I'm also a
25 resident of Mount Airy and I've lived in Germantown

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2 or Mount Airy since 1981.

3 First I want to say that we oppose the
4 cut of the PGW senior citizen discount. Nearly half
5 of Philadelphia's seniors are disabled, and more
6 likely women are likely to be more disabled even
7 than 50 percent. And as women get older, we get
8 more disabled.

9 More than 30 percent live on an income
10 that's below 150 percent of the poverty level. Most
11 survive on Social Security or retirement benefits
12 that are between 10,000 and 15,000 a year, and out
13 of the 159,000 households in Philadelphia that have
14 a senior citizen, over half have applied for the
15 discount.

16 A previous speaker talked about how
17 women are the least likely to afford the increases
18 and the utilities and afford to lose the discount.
19 For women with disabilities, our disability benefits
20 are lower because women's wages is less well paid or
21 a lot of women work in jobs that aren't even covered
22 by Social Security. So when we become disabled or
23 retire, we get the very lowest benefits, SSI.

24 I also want to say we oppose the other
25 cuts and services, like the office closures. Women

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2 who are wheelchair users, women who have problems
3 with vision are most impacted by these things, and
4 it's a terrible burden and a terrible way to treat
5 people in society who are in most need of
6 assistance.

7 And, third, I want to say we oppose any
8 means testing on many grounds. First of all,
9 because those who are most likely to need the
10 discount are the least likely to apply for it, for a
11 number of reasons. For women with disabilities,
12 even just getting to the offices to do the paperwork
13 is a problem. If you have problems with your
14 vision, if you just don't have anybody to help you
15 get there and figure out what's going on, it's
16 really a problem.

17 I'm also the daughter of immigrants, and
18 I want to say that language is something that people
19 haven't addressed and that is another reason that
20 people who are most likely in need of the discount
21 aren't going to be applying for it. I know with my
22 parents, who now live 300 miles away, I still have
23 to go through their paperwork when I come to visit
24 and go through all their official forms, help them
25 figure out what's going on. If you are not familiar

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2 with the English language or even if you are,
3 sometimes those forms are completely not
4 understandable. I mean, come on, let's face reality
5 here.

6 So it's the people who most need it who
7 are most likely to be hurt. And as Mildred said
8 before me, there have been years of mismanagement,
9 years of corruption and outright thievery, as these
10 criminal charges have shown, and we refuse to let
11 PGW after all this corruption balance their budgets,
12 fix their economic problems on the backs of our
13 seniors.

14 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Dean Kendall and
15 Evangelist Jackson.

16 MR. KENDALL: My name is Dean Kendall.
17 I'm with Pay Day, which is a network of men which
18 organizes with the Wages for Housework Campaign and
19 other women who work out of the Crossroads Women
20 Center, where I volunteer.

21 I'm not from Philadelphia. I live up
22 near Reading. I'm a statistans farmer. But cutting
23 the senior citizen discount in Philly would affect
24 me too.

25 It would just add to the momentum of

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2 cuts at all levels of government, local, state,
3 federal, everybody. They're cutting back in all
4 kinds of social programs and subsidize the military
5 budget that just keeps growing and growing and now
6 an unprovoked war on Iraq. And this is at a time
7 when people like my mother on fixed incomes are
8 facing home heating fuel bills. They've about
9 doubled in the last year.

10 I say we need to hold on to social
11 programs that put your needs first and build on them
12 and not throw them out or cut them back, like means
13 testing would effectively do.

14 Thank you.

15 MS. JACKSON: Good afternoon, everyone.
16 I'm Evangelist Etruella Jackson and I'm a senior
17 citizen, and I'm speaking for us, for all of us.

18 It's really hard. I've heard them speak
19 and say that many of them are handicapped, but all
20 of our senior citizens are handicapped one way or
21 another. We are. And there seems to be that they
22 have taken the senior citizens, who have worked all
23 of their lives, built this city, built this country,
24 put down their lives, and now we're still going back
25 to other generations raising their grands and their

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2 great grands, taking us and sticking us off in a
3 corner somewhere and take everything that we have
4 worked for, even our Social Security that we have
5 worked for and taking it away from us, and putting
6 us somewhere and telling us we're going to take your
7 discount.

8 This is wrong. While the rich get
9 richer and the poor gets poorer. I say to our
10 congressman, Do something for us, because it is
11 wrong to take us and throw us away, after we have
12 worked all of our lives. It's time for us to sit
13 down and enjoy what we have worked for now, and it's
14 time for us to give up fighting and going on trying
15 to make ends meet while they have taken and closed
16 down the PGW.

17 And I want to say this: When they open
18 up these centers for us to go pay our bills, trying
19 to make it easier for us, when I go in there to pay
20 my bill and they tell me, It costs you a dollar, I
21 said, You are crazy, I'm not going to pay nobody to
22 pay a bill. I'll put it in the mailbox first. I
23 don't care how long it takes you to get it. And I
24 got a copy of my check. And I am not going to give
25 you a dollar, I'm not going to give you 25 cents for

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2 you to get rich off of me just to pay my bill, when
3 I can send it myself for nothing. Is that
4 understood?

5 See, we need to understand this: They
6 are taking advantage of us in every way that they
7 can and they put us off in some kind of little dinky
8 hole that ain't got no kind of security, no kind of
9 nothing and tell us, suey.

10 I still got my good sense. I don't
11 think I'm senile. I don't think I have Alzheimer's
12 and I don't have dementia, not yet. So I don't
13 intend to go for this.

14 And we need help and we need somebody in
15 the White House and in these congressmen's office to
16 fight for us, because I don't know one thing about
17 fighting for myself.

18 I could say more, but I'm going to give
19 somebody else a chance to say something.

20 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. We're
21 rocking now.

22 The Honorable Donna Reed Miller.

23 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Good afternoon. I
24 was raised on the concept of protecting children and
25 protecting and respecting senior citizens. I mean,

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2 how can you not love our older adults? Ms. Jackson
3 over here is just a prime example of what we want to
4 do to embrace and protect.

5 Seniors have paid their dues. You've
6 earned the right for any discount that we can give
7 you. And I just wanted to stop by here today -- I
8 mean, we were there in City Council for the
9 hearings -- to say that I certainly support this 20
10 percent senior discount without a means test. I
11 support anything that we can do for senior citizens.
12 I think it's important that we keep things in place.

13 There are many of us that when we blink,
14 we're going to be 65 years old.

15 I support keeping the new facility here,
16 this apartment, in good shape, because one day I may
17 need it.

18 And I just wanted to say that if I'm
19 lucky, if we're all lucky, those in this room that
20 are not 65, that we will be around to collect a 20
21 percent discount.

22 The PGW bills are outrageous. I have an
23 office on Germantown Avenue, just really right up
24 the street and around the corner, and my gas bill --
25 it's on the second floor. My gas bill for the last

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2 month was \$435, and I just could not believe it.

3 So we don't want to see seniors get in
4 the position of trying to figure out whether they're
5 going to heat their house or buy their medicine. We
6 have enough problems with the healthcare system and
7 the high cost of medication.

8 I'm a diabetic, and at some point -- I'm
9 going to really research and really take a hard look
10 at the laws as it relates to prescriptions, because
11 I know that I'm not going to be able to afford my
12 medicine.

13 So we have enough problems. And as -- I
14 don't know whether it was Ms. Jackson, but the
15 speaker prior to her talked about that many of our
16 seniors now are raising grandchildren because of the
17 drug problems that are running rapid through our
18 communities. So if we can make you as comfortable
19 as possible, that's what we want to do. And if we
20 can maintain a 20 percent discount to do that, I
21 just want to say today that I am for the 20 percent
22 PGW discount to seniors regardless of their status
23 at age 65.

24 Thank you.

25 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Lucille Ijoy and Jody

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2 Anders.

3 MS. IJOY: Thank you. Thank you very
4 much. I'm happy to be here this afternoon to speak
5 for ussons (ph). I'm a senior citizen, and I love
6 being one. I'm 71. I like it, you know. But I
7 never thought that when I picked up an envelope from
8 my mail slot that my heart would jump, but that's
9 exactly what happens when you bend over, pick up
10 your envelope. Because when you open it, you do not
11 know what it's going to say on the inside. So you
12 sort of get that tightness in your chest. And I'm
13 telling you, that tightness, that spurt of
14 scaredness, that afraidness, that is nothing but
15 major stress, which is death dealing.

16 Every time your heart goes pump and you
17 don't know how you're going to pay something or what
18 it's going to be and you know you have no control
19 and you know they're not going to do anything about
20 it as of now, although we're going to change that,
21 you hurt yourself. You hurt your body. You hurt
22 your -- everything. You get high blood, cancer,
23 diabetes, and you can't even -- you know, stress.
24 We're talking stress here and we're talking
25 constipation. And that is the truth.

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2 So I'm saying it's a health matter.

3 Stress is no good for us. We don't need it when
4 we're younger. We don't need it when we're middle
5 age. We don't need it when we're older. And we
6 need to fight, people. We need to know that April
7 the 21st is the last day you can register to vote,
8 if you moved or if you changed your name, your
9 status, whatever. We have to do something about
10 this. We can't go on like this. We must have our
11 representatives like this, which is marvelous. It's
12 good they're here, but we got to scream.

13 Stress is a mess. Do you hear me?

14 Stress is a mess. So we're going to do the chant
15 right here. Every time I say stress is a mess, you
16 say oowww. Okay? Stress is a mess.

17 AUDIENCE: Oowww.

18 MS. IJOY: Stress is a mess.

19 AUDIENCE: Oowww.

20 MS. IJOY: And if you listen to me, I
21 will tell you the rest, it's a mess.

22 MR. ANDERS: My name is Jody Anders.

23 I'm here to ask some questions to my Council. I'd
24 like to know, is PGW private or owned by
25 Philadelphia? Then I'd like to know how they do the

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2 rate. Whenever they raise the rate, do they have to
3 come through the councilmen to do that or they just
4 got a board of director they have to do? I'd like
5 to know all this, please.

6 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: This is my fourth
7 meeting today. I'm too tired to scream. And I have
8 to go to another one. Actually, I should have been
9 there at 3:00. I'm going to leave here in a few
10 minutes to go to another meeting. My day won't end.
11 My night won't end probably until around 10:30
12 tonight, so I have to save my voice.

13 No, they don't. PGW now is controlled
14 by the PUC, the Public Utility Commission.

15 MR. ANDERS: How did they get that?

16 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Well, it's -- does
17 it matter how it got to the PUC, how it got to the
18 Pennsylvania Utility Commission? It's state. It's
19 state regulated. The state set up the Public
20 Utility Commission umpteen years ago, but PGW has --
21 we have the Gas Commission, and there are members of
22 the Gas Commission and there are also members of the
23 PGW board. But right now, it's a state-regulated
24 agency.

25 But we as a group, you know, your

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2 elected officials on the city level and the state
3 level, I have not heard one really that agrees that
4 the seniors should not have a discount. I haven't
5 heard one councilmember say that this 20 percent
6 discount should no longer exist. Not one.

7 MR. ANDERS: So are you saying that in
8 other words PGW is private? The state or the city
9 has nothing to do with it, right?

10 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: The state and the
11 city has something to do with PGW. I didn't say
12 that they didn't.

13 MR. ANDERS: That means they got a board
14 of director running by the state and the city?

15 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Well, I'm not
16 really sure how their board of directors is made up.
17 I know that the city does have some people that sit
18 on the board, and maybe the Mayor appoints members
19 to the board. But I don't know that the -- PGW
20 doesn't just come up with its own board members, no.

21 The board of directors has influence,
22 the Gas Commission has some influence, but that just
23 changed maybe a year or so ago. But they still have
24 some influence, and residents have some influence.

25 MR. ANDERS: Another thing, do they get

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2 any money from the taxpayer?

3 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Who? PGW?

4 MR. ANDERS: Yeah.

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I don't think they
6 get any state subsidies or city? Do they? How
7 much? No. No.

8 MR. ANDERS: So everything when they
9 raise the gas price --

10 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: They have
11 hearings. When they have gas rate hearings, they
12 have hearings, and the public can show up at the
13 hearings to testify whether you support or whether
14 you don't support the gas rate increase. Most of
15 the time people don't show up. Most of the time
16 people do not show up.

17 SPEAKER: There's no reason to raise the
18 rate just because people don't show up.

19 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Well, that's true,
20 but you still got to go and give a voice.

21 MR. BERTOCCI: Just the question that
22 was asked as to who owns PGW, the City owns PGW.
23 The question was asked who sets the rates for PGW.
24 Now the rates are set by the Pennsylvania Public
25 Utility Commission, not by City Council, not by the

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2 Gas Commission.

3 There was another question that was
4 asked, which was is there any tax money that goes to
5 PGW. No. The costs of running PGW are paid by
6 customers, all of them. They figure out what the
7 costs are for the whole utility and then divide it
8 up to determine the rates for PGW.

9 In fact, PGW pays the city \$18 million
10 every year regardless of how PGW performs. So it's
11 really PGW is paying the City. The City does not
12 provide any money to PGW. However, the City owns
13 the pipes, they own the system. But they own the
14 system.

15 SPEAKER: Phil, can you mention that
16 last year the City gave PGW a one-time \$45 million
17 loan?

18 MR. Bertocci: Yes. Last year City
19 Council at the recommendation of the Gas Commission
20 provided a \$45 million loan to PGW to help PGW
21 through some cash flow problems that it was having.
22 And without that loan, it would have been likely
23 that there would have been higher rates paid by
24 customers in order to deal with that problem. So
25 that City Council has stepped in at certain very

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2 crucial points to try to cushion the pressure up on
3 customers coming from PGW.

4 MR. ANDERS: I'm sorry. But if we help
5 them, loan them money, get them out, but at the same
6 time they come back the following year and want to
7 get on the senior citizen and everybody else's rate.
8 I don't understand that.

9 MR. Bertocci: Well, the state
10 legislature set this up, and I think it's important
11 to remember that it wasn't City Council and it
12 wasn't -- it was the state legislators in
13 Harrisburg, the state senators and the state
14 representatives. Not necessarily Philadelphia's
15 senators or representatives who voted as part of
16 this thing called the Gas Choice Act to phase out
17 the senior citizen discount.

18 But the Act said also that City Council
19 could, by ordinance, speak as to what the City of
20 Philadelphia wanted to do about the senior citizen
21 discount. But if City Council didn't speak, then it
22 was going to be phased out. And that's why we're
23 here today, because certain City Council members had
24 seen that this is a problem and that it's City
25 Council that has to address it, and that's why we're

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2 here today.

3 MR. ANDERS: So now you're telling me
4 it's running -- the state handles it, right, through
5 the governor of the state, right? Last year we had
6 a republic governor, right? So now it's time for us
7 to bring it back to Governor Rendell and see what he
8 can do about it, right?

9 MR. Bertocci: Well, I've heard people
10 say that if we can't get the PUC to approve what the
11 City wants, which is the senior citizen discount
12 maintained, then the next step would be to go to the
13 state legislature and to go to the governor and say,
14 Let's put this thing back the way it was before it
15 got messed up.

16 MR. ANDERS: All right. Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: One of the
18 questions I asked was -- he's going to stay here.
19 This is an attorney from Community Legal Services.

20 I thought that perhaps there could be a
21 state-wide coalition, because what happens just
22 politically is that people from Philadelphia, our
23 state representatives from Philadelphia and our
24 state senators from Philadelphia, didn't necessarily
25 vote to discontinue the 20 percent discount. And

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2 that's why I asked him if there was some state-wide
3 coalition that could be formed, and that would be
4 seniors all over the state, because Pennsylvania has
5 the second highest population of senior citizens,
6 second only to Florida.

7 However, if the other utility companies
8 outside of Philadelphia are privately owned -- I
9 wanted to know if Philadelphia was the only place
10 that had the discount, and the answer is yes. He
11 told me Philadelphia is the only place that has the
12 discount.

13 So one of the things that would help
14 would be -- and maybe you can do it through the -- I
15 know there's a state-wide group that advocates for
16 seniors, and perhaps that group could be the group,
17 because you're going to have to reach state reps
18 from across the state, and all the other places
19 across the state are different from Philadelphia.
20 And sometimes Philadelphia is seen like a stepchild.

21 But through the state-wide coalition
22 that advocates for senior citizens, maybe you can
23 get seniors from across the state to join the
24 Philadelphia groups to say, Keep Philadelphia's
25 senior discount. And that's what you probably have

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2 to do.

3 SPEAKER: Can other cities come through,
4 talk to our representative --

5 COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: We can talk. We
6 always talk. But you have to talk too through the
7 state-wide coalition. We can talk. This is a
8 partnership. We can do our share, but we need you
9 to participate. And I know that Rennie Cohen that
10 ran the Center in the Park left to do consultant
11 work. She's retired now. She's doing consultant
12 work for a group that's a state-wide group.

13 So what I am saying is -- and many
14 people in this room, I believe, attend Center in the
15 Park. So what I am saying is that through the
16 groups that are already formed to advocate for the
17 older adults, that is the avenue too that you can go
18 to. We'll do what we need to do, but it has to be a
19 partnership. We can't do it all. They need to hear
20 from you, need to hear from the advocacy groups.
21 Okay?

22 All right. I have to leave. It's been
23 enjoyable. Thank you for inviting me here,
24 Crossroads, and I'll come back again whenever, but
25 today I have another meeting. Thank you.

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2 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Is there anyone else who
3 would like to give testimony?

4 I just want to bring up a couple of
5 points. There are some people that -- I know maybe
6 you read the Philadelphia Inquirer, very cynical
7 column a couple of days ago, on Wednesday, about the
8 gas discount by Tom Ferrick. It was the Metro
9 section. And the very cynical column talked about
10 that what PGW can do is to establish a means test
11 for this program, so only those seniors who need it
12 will get it.

13 Well, we have experienced, or the Action
14 Alliance of Senior Citizens, with means-tested
15 programs. And our experience through 30 years of
16 working with senior citizens is that those programs
17 that have a means test often, most often, do not
18 help the people who need it the most.

19 Let me tell you one program that is
20 really a good program. It's called the Medicare
21 Savings Programs, and that's a program that will pay
22 you part of the premium for Medicare.

23 Now this year if you're on it, it will
24 save you \$700, because part of your premium gets
25 deducted automatically from your Social Security

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2 check.

3 In Pennsylvania, we have only 50 percent
4 of those seniors who are eligible actually getting
5 that particular benefit of \$700 a year. There are
6 229,000 people in Pennsylvania who qualify for that
7 discount who are not in it. You know why? Up until
8 a couple of years ago, the enrollment form was 16
9 pages long, and it asked questions such as, have you
10 or anyone in your household been ever convicted of
11 possession of marijuana. There was 16 pages long.

12 That was the Department of Welfare,
13 which is another problem.

14 SPEAKER: Can I ask you another
15 question?

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

17 SPEAKER: Who was the head of the
18 Department of Welfare?

19 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Back then, it was
20 Feather Houston.

21 SPEAKER: He's the one that --

22 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Feather is a she,
23 Feather Houston. But it was part of Governor
24 Ridge's whole apparatus.

25 So we asked them to reduce the

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2 enrollment form from 16 to something more
3 manageable. So they printed it out to four pages.
4 It took two years for Action Alliance to get them to
5 do that. It would make sense. And the 16 pages
6 actually had not once, it was not a single line,
7 that it spoke about the program that people were
8 signing up for. So you fill out 16 pages of nothing
9 that was related to what you were applying for.
10 Then you look at all of that and then they say maybe
11 you were or were not eligible for it.

12 That's what happens with means-tested
13 programs. We know what happens. The people who
14 need it the most, the people that you say you want
15 to help, often do not get the help, because there
16 are obstacles in the road.

17 We like it the way it is now. We have
18 about 80,000 people in the senior citizen discount
19 in Philadelphia right now. It is very simple to
20 sign up for. Actually, we want to make it even
21 simpler, make it easier for people to sign up.

22 So the argument that you means test it
23 and then you will only help those who can benefit
24 the most from it is a bogus argument. If you really
25 want to help those who need it the most, you don't

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2 put any obstacles in the process of those people
3 getting the discount.

4 The second point, that those of us who
5 are not 65 yet -- I'm getting there, but I'm not 65
6 yet -- and we pay our gas bill on a regular basis,
7 we are subsidizing the rest of those over 65 who are
8 getting the discount. Our estimate is, and PGW
9 concurs with this, it only comes to about \$2.50 a
10 month for those who are not 65 to subsidize the
11 discount.

12 You know, in this town I can't buy a
13 beer for \$2.50. It's 2.50 a month. So I'm paying
14 2.50 a month to help 80,000 people. That's the
15 biggest bang for the buck I ever heard. And a lot
16 of people my age, and you heard people speak to that
17 today, they're willing to do that. They'll be glad
18 to do that.

19 This winter so far six senior citizens
20 have frozen to death in Philadelphia. This winter
21 six senior citizens have frozen to death in
22 Philadelphia. And that's unacceptable as a society.
23 That's unacceptable to all of us. And we should do
24 everything we can to prevent those tragedies from
25 happening in our city.

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2 The third problem has to do with the
3 finances of PGW. Well, we all know the stories what
4 happened with PGW, and we do not believe that they
5 should try to balance the books on the backs of
6 senior citizens. That's just unacceptable.

7 Finally, who is responsible for all of
8 this? And the state legislator under the watch and
9 control of John Persale, the republican minority
10 whip from Northeast Philadelphia, and his power grab
11 to grab everything that he can in Philadelphia went
12 on a midnight rage and shifted control from
13 Philadelphia of the Gas Works and gave it to
14 Harrisburg.

15 John Persale is the one responsible for
16 this debate today. John Persale has no
17 consideration for senior citizens in Philadelphia
18 and not in his district, much less people who don't
19 live in his district. And I must say this: The
20 Philadelphia elected leadership was silent when that
21 happened. We went and spoke to the mayor at the
22 time, we spoke to members of City Council and
23 members of the Gas Commission, and we sent an alarm
24 that we needed to speak out and prevent that
25 midnight rage from being accomplished. They didn't

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2 say a word. And when some of them spoke, you can
3 barely hear what they were saying.

4 Eventually we might have to deal with
5 that issue in Harrisburg, but right now our fight is
6 with the Philadelphia City Council and then with the
7 Mayor of the City of Philadelphia.

8 City Council will debate two bills that
9 will continue the existence of the discount the way
10 that we want it, as is, and City Council will pass
11 that bill, and City Council needs to hear from you.
12 You heard the district councilperson for this
13 district speak about that, and you need to have the
14 at-large members of City Council hear from you.

15 MR. CARNEY: My name is Tim Carney. I'm
16 a legislative aide with City Councilman David Cohen.
17 And, Pedro, I thank you for letting me interrupt for
18 one second.

19 Pedro is right, we have a hearing on
20 April 1st in front of Council, but I would like to
21 reiterate what Councilwoman Donna Miller said today,
22 which is the same that Councilman-at-Large Wilson
23 Goode, who is chairman of the Public Utilities
24 Committee, said about three weeks ago and numerous
25 other Council members have said and Councilwoman

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2 Miller today said, I think every single member of
3 Council supports the discount.

4 So as much as we all have to come to
5 Council on April 1st and Council has to do it
6 formally, I think I'm not going out on very much of
7 a limb to say that Council is in support of
8 maintaining the discount just the way it is, and
9 then the ball goes into the Mayor's court and we
10 need the Mayor to sign it. That then sends a very
11 clear message to the PUC, who has yet to make a
12 final decision on the rate restructuring case that
13 started last summer. So that's what we need.

14 Council, I'm almost positive, will pass
15 it probably unanimously. Then we need to get the
16 Mayor to sign it so that the City will be speaking
17 with one voice in front of the PUC.

18 The PUC has five commissioners and they
19 were all appointed, one each year, by Schweiker and
20 by Ridge. All five were appointed by republican
21 governors. That may be the bad news. The good news
22 is the republican candidate also, like all members
23 of City Council, the republican candidate for mayor
24 supports the discount. He said that yesterday at a
25 hearing exactly like this at the South Philadelphia

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2 Older Adult Center.

3 So I think we have to persist, we have
4 to follow through, and if we get even just the
5 slightest break, we're going to be able to keep the
6 senior citizen discount. But we just have to follow
7 through.

8 But right now I think the one thing you
9 can absolutely rely on is that the Philadelphia City
10 Council, and I agree with Councilwoman Miller, and
11 hopefully my boss will be here very soon and say the
12 same thing, I think the Philadelphia City Council is
13 going to vote unanimously to send a message to the
14 PUC to keep this, and the PUC has the power to let
15 it remain just the way it is if they want to.

16 QUESTIONER: Does PGW get subsidized any
17 kind of support from the government?

18 MR. CARNEY: No. No. The Public
19 Utility Commission is five commissioners, and as far
20 as I know, it's paid for 100 percent by state tax
21 dollars. It's 100 percent a state utility
22 commission that regulates utilities.

23 And I see Phil Bertocci nodding here.
24 And Phil has forgotten more than I'm ever going to
25 know. Phil is an expert on Pennsylvania utility law

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2 and Pennsylvania utility practices.

3 QUESTIONER: Because like when senior
4 citizens get a cut rate, a lot of times the company
5 will send money into the federal government to be
6 subsidized for helping out senior citizens or
7 handicapped people.

8 MR. CARNEY: There is a subsidy to help
9 people with heating called lie heat, which is a
10 different issue. Lie Heat is federal money that
11 passes through the state governments to go to people
12 in the 50 states. That is a subsidy to help people
13 with their heating bills that's different than this
14 gas discount, because that's just for heating bills,
15 and this gas discount helps you with your hot water
16 heater, your dryer, anything that would run off of
17 gas.

18 QUESTIONER: The gas company can send so
19 much -- send in a requisition for the people to get
20 their money.

21 MR. CARNEY: Yes. The gas company
22 can --

23 QUESTIONER: I mean, they give you money
24 from the federal government -- I mean they give you
25 subsidy money from the federal government. That can

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2 be called your check.

3 MR. CARNEY: If you want to talk about
4 the federal money that goes to people to help pay
5 their gas bills, then yes, PGW gets the money from
6 the federal government through that program to help
7 people pay their heating bills.

8 Pedro, I'm sorry to interrupt. Where
9 did you go?

10 I'm going to turn this back over to
11 Patricia as the emcee. Thank you.

12 MS. ALBRIGHT: I want to see if anyone
13 here at the table wanted to say anything.

14 MR. VAUGHN: Good afternoon. My name is
15 Steven Vaughn and I'm the chief of staff for
16 Councilwoman Donna Reed Miller, and as she
17 mentioned, she had to go to another meeting. We've
18 been going to meetings all day.

19 And, again, Councilwoman Miller and I
20 believe other members of City Council is going to be
21 totally supportive and take the position that the 20
22 percent discount stays intact, without any
23 conditions, notwithstanding. As a matter of fact, I
24 think City Council probably needs to figure out a
25 way to get them something over and above the 20

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2 percent discount, because it's very detrimental when
3 they take that from you, given the cost of living
4 today, coupled with the cost of gas per cubic feet.

5 That's how they rate you. That's how
6 they charge you. And now they're asking for an
7 additional increase to even charge you more money.

8 So as she mentioned, she's going to
9 support this. She's going to support that we keep
10 this 20 percent discount for seniors. I think I'm
11 going to fight very hard to keep it going forward.
12 And everyone has to join hands, join with your state
13 representatives, both state reps and senators, and
14 let everyone know, including the Mayor, including
15 the now Governor Rendell, that you would like to
16 make sure that PUC does not increase the rate for
17 gas use. It's very critical that you do that.

18 They need to hear this and hear it very
19 loud, and if not, we're not certain what PUC will
20 do. And if we leave it to them without our
21 outcries, our public outcries, they might try to do
22 anything.

23 So it's very encouraging that you let
24 them know without question that we want to maintain
25 for Philadelphia County, for this city the 20

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2 percent senior citizens discount. And you must urge
3 all Council members, the Mayor, all your
4 representatives, including the Governor, not to
5 allow PUC to increase these rates.

6 Thank you very much.

7 MS. ALBRIGHT: Councilman David Cohen
8 has now arrived. Let's give him a warm welcome.

9 Thank you very much for coming.

10 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thanks for the warm
11 welcome, but I think you got to warm up the people
12 in Philadelphia, you got to warm up the state Public
13 Utility Commission and let them know your old
14 slogan, We're tired of this and we're not going to
15 take anymore. Because what's happening today is an
16 offensive against poor people.

17 What President Bush and his buddies are
18 trying to do is reverse everything and take from the
19 poor and give to the rich. That's what he did with
20 the tax cut, didn't he? And I think we got to
21 change it. And the only way it changes is if you're
22 ready to take it, they'll hand it out to you, make
23 you take more and more.

24 But if you understand that in this
25 country we have a democracy and that the people

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2 control it when the people decide to control it,
3 then you'll see that government will begin listening
4 to you and following your plan instead of following
5 the plan of those who believe that workers and poor
6 people have no rights.

7 The history of the United States and the
8 history of modern government is that the court
9 systems and everything about government was intended
10 to protect the rich from the poor. The rich always
11 have been afraid that the poor are going to get a
12 fair deal along the way, and so they created a court
13 system to protect the rich.

14 They created the police to protect the
15 rich from the poor, who they were afraid were going
16 to steal everything from them. So the rich people
17 stealing means if a poor person earns a living wage,
18 that's stealing from the rich, they say. But we got
19 to reverse that.

20 This is our government. The vote of an
21 ordinary worker is just as important in a democracy
22 like the United States as the vote of a rich man.
23 It doesn't matter if you own \$10 billion. You only
24 get one vote in this country.

25 But what they've done over the years is,

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2 they fooled people into believing there's no point
3 in voting. Everybody is against us. Well, that's
4 not true. We have enough people among ordinary
5 working people and poor people in numbers, we can
6 make government do what it's supposed to do, and
7 what government is supposed to do is to benefit
8 people, not say, You're getting older now, now we're
9 going to get ready to bury you and we want to hasten
10 that day by freezing you, and if you don't get
11 frozen, then we're not going to let you have money
12 enough for medicines, because we're not going to
13 give you enough money for food.

14 Now, that's the fix that people are in
15 in the United States, and it's about time we change
16 it. And we're not going change it unless we realize
17 we got power if we use it.

18 Don't let people believe there's no
19 point in voting. By voting you elect the people who
20 are going to do your bidding. You want to try and
21 experiment? Test me out, see if I'm right. Bring
22 five people down from your district into a district
23 councilman's office, bring five people who live in
24 Philadelphia anywhere in the councilman-at-large's
25 office and you'll find they begin listening to you.

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2 We're elected officials. We know we're in power
3 only because you put us in power.

4 If we can put you to sleep so that you
5 don't exercise your power, then we don't have
6 anything to worry about, right? We can do whatever
7 we want to. Don't trust any public officials,
8 including me. That's why Florence, who I think just
9 walked in, says to me with a lot of regularity, What
10 did you sell out on today? Because she has that
11 healthy distrust of politicians.

12 She knows politicians are under lots of
13 pressures from people, mostly people with money,
14 because people that have money want to protect their
15 property. And every time we talk about a living
16 wage for working people, they get scared, because
17 it's going to cut down on the profits.

18 They've never been able to live with the
19 fact that the Gas Works by a 1973 act 30 years ago,
20 City Council had a moment of sanity. It said we're
21 going to do something good. We're going to create a
22 20 percent discount for senior citizens. They
23 worked hard all their life, we're going to reward
24 them, we're going to tell them Philadelphia is
25 interested in their life.

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2 For 30 years they've been scheming to
3 take it away from us, because you know why? PECO
4 would love nothing better than to take over the Gas
5 Works. Every time the city tried to get rid of the
6 Gas Works, all the private companies said, No, we're
7 not going to take cash by you until you get rid of
8 the senior citizen discount.

9 I think this is just a plot to enable
10 PGW to be sold to some private company, and then
11 watch the gas rates go up.

12 So don't be quiet. Don't feel you have
13 to pay attention. If people who want to listen to
14 you don't listen -- don't want to listen to you, you
15 interrupt them. There's nothing about being quiet
16 and orderly, there's nothing good about it, except
17 it keeps you quiet and let's the rich people get
18 richer all the time.

19 So I just don't want to hold you. I'm
20 sorry I'm late, but I had to attend to my vision and
21 make sure these glasses are replaced by more
22 appropriate glasses. Not the frames; they'll be the
23 same so you'll recognize me. I won't look any
24 different. So I just wanted to make it, and I'm
25 happy I did. Fight for your rights.

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2 And one last item. In a war time, sure
3 we all want our people in uniform to come home
4 safely. You know, we hope the war ends quickly and
5 we hope it achieves the democratic purposes we want
6 it to achieve, but one thing you have to know in any
7 war time situations, people's rights are endangered.

8 So a lot of people -- I won't mention
9 names beyond maybe a few, like President Bush and
10 John Ashcroft and Cheney, the vice-president, who
11 have been looking for reasons to take away rights
12 from people. And they're going to use the war. I
13 don't say they made the war for this purpose, but
14 they're going to want to take advantage of it and
15 they're going to want to frighten everybody to be
16 quiet. Why? For the good of the country? No; for
17 their own good, to let take care of their business,
18 which is to keep getting richer.

19 Likewe did with the stadiums, right?
20 We didn't like to have poor millionaires around. We
21 decided we'd make them billionaires. So that's why
22 tax money was used to pay for the stadium. We felt
23 sorry for the millionaires. We wanted to make sure
24 they had more money. So we used tax money to help
25 them build the stadiums, in the same way the rich

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2 people are always contriving to get richer and
3 richer.

4 And every time we fight on behalf of the
5 people who are really the important people in this
6 world, they're the people in Philadelphia, who live
7 here seven days a week, 24 hours a day, who send
8 their kids to the public schools, who live in
9 Philadelphia, who do business in the local stores,
10 that's the way to rebuild Philadelphia, by
11 supporting the people who live in the city, the
12 working people, the poor people.

13 Don't let anybody make you feel so
14 scared about a war or so polite that you're afraid
15 to voice your opinion. Voice your opinion, talk to
16 your neighbors and, by God, when it comes time to
17 register to vote and to vote, do it, and talk to
18 your neighbors and get them to do it. Ask them, Why
19 are you letting your rights be violated? Talk up.
20 Don't let the war psychosis sort of scare you into
21 feeling you got to behave now. You don't have to
22 behave, because if you behave, other people are
23 going to misbehave, and it's not going to be the
24 workers who misbehave, it's the rich people.

25 Imagine the nerve at a time when more

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2 than 40 million Americans have no medical insurance,
3 at that time you give a tax cut to the rich because
4 you can't afford to have ordinary people take care
5 of their health. I guess they wanted a quick way to
6 kill us off.

7 So, remember, you're fighting for your
8 family, you're fighting for your rights. This
9 country is based on the will of the majority.
10 You're the majority. Exercise that power. Use it.
11 As the old saying goes, if you don't use it, you
12 lose it. So if you don't use your power, you're
13 going to lose it. So for God's sake, let's storm
14 the Public Utility Commission when they have the
15 hearings. Let's go down in a large volume and say,
16 Stop stealing from us, we earned the right to this
17 20 percent discount, and if anything, if you want to
18 make a change, make it 25 percent, not 20 percent.

19 Thank you very, very much.

20 MS. ALBRIGHT: Thank you very much,
21 Councilman Cohen.

22 Actually, since I represent a women's
23 center here today, I want to take a moment to also
24 recognize Florence Cohen because at her work, I'm
25 sure it's very much been contributed to --

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: She's the real
3 Councilman Cohen.

4 MS. ALBRIGHT: She's the real Councilman
5 Cohen.

6 I also wanted to thank the Center in the
7 Park director, Lynn Harris, for allowing us to use
8 this lovely space here today.

9 And I want to see if anyone else had
10 anything that they wanted to add before we close the
11 meeting who didn't speak, feels like they'd like to
12 say something now.

13 But I would like to bring to your
14 attention that we do have the Save Our Services
15 coalition that has a petition here at the table.
16 Maybe somebody will hold it up. And so we hope that
17 you will join. If you have an organization that
18 would like to become a member and part of the
19 coalition, if you wanted to take some petitions with
20 you and pass along to your neighbors.

21 We've collected now over 11,000
22 signatures and have been delivering them when we
23 have the strength to give stacks like this to City
24 Council members, and we've just in the last couple
25 of weeks have gathered about almost 500 more

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2 signatures.

3 And Tim says -- well, I want you all to
4 remember that April 1st is a very important hearing
5 of the two bills in City Council, and there is no
6 PUC hearing coming up. It's the City Council
7 hearing, and that's on April 1st in Room 696 at 10
8 o'clock, I believe. We don't know -- in City Hall,
9 Room 696. And if you contact our center or the City
10 Council, they'll tell you the time. Probably 10
11 o'clock. Wilson Goode did say 10 o'clock. So we
12 think it's at 10 o'clock, Room 696, April 1st. We
13 hope you all will be there.

14 In the meanwhile, if you want to be in
15 touch and continue circulating the petition and
16 spread the word among your neighbors and networks to
17 get as many people as we can there on April 1st.

18 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Get your neighbors
19 out with you. Don't come alone. We need people
20 from every block in the City of Philadelphia. Then
21 we'll get the results.

22 MS. ALBRIGHT: On behalf of the members
23 of City Council and Action Alliance for Senior
24 Citizens and the Crossroads Women's Center, again,
25 thank you very much to the Center in the Park and

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2 for all of you for coming and participating this
3 afternoon.

4 (Hearing concluded at 4:00 p.m.)

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MICHELE L. MURPHY

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RPR-Notary Public

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