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MADISON GAS & ELECTRIC USING RATE INCREASE TO LOWBALL EMPLOYEES AS PROFITS SOAR

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Madison, WI – The Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 39, the Union representing white collar workers at Madison Gas & Electric (MGE), say that the Company is using its application for a utility rate increase as an excuse not to pay its workers fair wages. The Union and Company have been bargaining since April.

MGE filed an application with state regulators in May requesting an increase in utility rates, after raising prices in January. MGE is one of the most expensive energy utilities in Wisconsin, reporting approximately \$111 million in profit last year.

Kelsey Hahn, OPEIU 39's Chief Steward at MGE, explained, "MGE is trying to close these deals quickly to make their case to regulators. They want to appear to the public as though they need the rate increase for renewable energy. But then they're using it as a reason to push their lowest-paid staff to settle for a contract that doesn't meet our needs." Ria Dowd, steward and member of OPEIU's bargaining committee, agreed, "The rate increase is its own thing – they're already making millions of dollars in profits."

Kathryn Barlett-Mulvihill, OPEIU 39 President, described what is happening at the bargaining table: "What they're offering is in effect a pay cut. They are not addressing the inflation that's battered working people, and they're asking for us to give up a say in our health insurance."

"Many of our members are living paycheck-to-paycheck," added Hahn, "MGE promotes themselves as a community energy company, but they don't pay enough to live in this community. We have vacancies that they can't fill – people are leaving faster than they can be replaced." Recruitment and retention have been central to the Union's proposals, as positions have been left unfilled or substituted with contracting firms. "MGE has been bringing in contractors who don't have the same training or dedication to safety, and it creates an added burden on our represented staff," says Hahn.

Colleen Casey, OPEIU steward and bargaining committee member, elaborated, "During the last outage, they were asking employees who no longer work in the call center to staff phones, and there were still dozens of calls in queue. That's a service issue. Our working conditions are directly related to the wellbeing of our customers."

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