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# ILLINOIS ENERGY FORUM

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## **NASEO and NARUC Announce Initiative on Cybersecurity in Solar Projects**

The National Association of State Energy Officials and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners have launched a new partnership to mitigate cybersecurity risks and consequences in solar energy developments. With support from the United States Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Office, the project will leverage state, federal and private-sector expertise on cybersecurity, grid and photovoltaic to identify model solar-cybersecurity programs and actions for states to take in partnership with utilities and the solar industry.

The rapid growth and importance of solar energy has elevated the critical need among state-level decision makers to evaluate the potential cybersecurity implications of solar deployment and work with federal and private-sector stakeholders to mitigate those risks. Newer two-way communication technologies and remote grid support are revolutionizing how the grid operates, but also result in a system more exposed to cyber

## **ICC Approves Landmark COVID-19 Utility Relief Agreements**

An extraordinary consumer protection effort, initiated by the Illinois Commerce Commission, helps ensure eligible residential and small business utility customers can continue to receive life-saving electric, gas, water and sewer services once the moratorium on disconnections for non-payment and late payment fees expires. On June 18, the ICC voted unanimously in favor of a stipulated agreement negotiated by Commission Staff, the Attorney General's Office and other consumer advocate groups, and the state's largest utilities, offering temporary, more flexible credit and collection procedures to customers financially hard hit by COVID-19. A separate agreement was also approved with smaller electricity, gas and water utilities that serve

Illinois residents.

"More than one million unemployment claims have been filed in Illinois since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, and even as Illinois begins the process of reopening, uncertainty remains. The terms of this agreement acknowledge that families and small businesses across Illinois are hurting and may need additional help managing their utility bills to stay connected once the moratorium on shutoffs is lifted," said ICC Chairman Carrie Zalewski. "Reaching this agreement was no easy task. I would like to thank all of the parties involved for their time, compassion and hard work."

On March 18, 2020, at the request of Governor JB Pritzker and Attorney General Kwame Raoul, the ICC formalized a moratorium on utility disconnections and late payment fees to ensure the continuation of essential services during the COVID-19

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## FROM THE STAFF

**Heading** into the dog days of summer, we hope everyone is focused on staying safe as news from around the country shows that COVID-19 is certainly not going away. Illinois has done a remarkable job of dealing with the virus, but we need to continue to be vigilant in our efforts to mitigate the impact on the health and welfare of our citizens, as well as the state's economy. Summer presents many temptations to relax our anti-virus efforts. And, we can see what that really looks like in scenes from beaches and parties in other states. Don't relax. Stay Strong. **IEF**

*(Continued from Page 1)*

## NARUC

vulnerabilities. NASEO and NARUC seek to proactively address cyber threats in all energy areas, including solar infrastructure.

"As energy systems become more integrated and cyber-connected, their vulnerability to malicious actions grows. Solar technologies are no exception; new tools and a dedicated, multi-stakeholder approach should strengthen solar cybersecurity, and by doing so, enable states to make meaningful progress on climate and resilience goals," said Commissioner Andrew McAllister of the California Energy Commission and chairman of the NASEO Board of Directors... **IEF**

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## ICC

public health emergency in Docket No. 20-0309. As part of the order, the Commission also directed the utilities to implement plans to offer temporary flexible credit and collection practices during the recovery process which launched negotiations into the stipulated agreement.

"At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, at my request, Chairman Zalewski led the Commission's work to end utility shutoffs and late payment fees to ease the burden and provide peace of mind for residents during this unprecedented crisis. The collaborative agreement finalized today takes a step further in that same spirit and will provide much needed relief and bill assistance to families throughout our recovery," said Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

The large utility stipulated agreement covers eight of the state's major utility companies. The large utility stipulated agreement covers eight of the state's major utility companies, including: Aqua Illinois, Illinois-American Water Company, Utility Services of Illinois, Inc., Ameren Illinois Company, Northern Illinois Gas Company (Nicor Gas), North Shore Gas Company, The Peoples Gas Light & Cole Company (Peoples Gas), and Commonwealth Edison Company (ComEd). **IEF**

## Nicor Gas President Melvin D. Williams to Retire After More Than 30 Years of Service

Southern Company Gas has announced that Melvin D. Williams, president of Nicor Gas and senior vice president of Southern Company Gas will retire, effective Sept. 1.

Since his appointment as president of Nicor Gas in 2015, Williams has continually advanced the company's focus and commitment to safety, establishing it as the number one value in providing safe and reliable natural gas to Nicor Gas' 2.2 million customers.

Under his leadership, the largest infrastructure rehabilitation effort in Nicor Gas' history was deployed. Through Investing in Illinois, cast iron main pipelines and copper services were retired, resulting in the safe replacement of more than 831 miles of aging, natural gas pipeline and underground storage systems. Nearly 100,000 service replacements also were conducted throughout the 656 communities Nicor Gas serves. Investing in Illinois is Nicor Gas' system improvement initiative designed to help ensure the continued safe and reliable delivery of natural gas in the state of Illinois. **IEF**

### **Vistra Commits \$10 Million to Organizations Working for Social Justice and Equity**

Vistra has announced that it is committing \$10 million over the next five years to support the advancement of minority communities.

“I think it is pretty simple: Companies have an obligation to ensure an equitable workplace and to help our communities – whether faced with a pandemic, a natural disaster, or inequality and social injustice. Vistra does not see the issues plaguing our country through a political lens; we see it through our people, our communities, and our customers,” said Curt Morgan, president and CEO of Vistra. “We must acknowledge that, for some people in our society, there are fewer opportunities and resources, and we are determined to change that. It’s the right thing to do.”

This investment is a reaffirmation and extension of existing efforts, which focus on national, state, and local organizations that grow minority-owned small businesses, enhance economic development, and provide and improve educational opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. Today’s announcement is consistent with the key focus areas of the company’s giving policy and builds upon Vistra’s donations in excess of \$30 million over the past several years to benefit low-income and minority communities.

“When deciding where to put our focus, we looked to those areas where we believe Vistra can have the most impact – investing in people through education and economic development. When small businesses thrive in minority neighborhoods, they not only provide access to goods and services to local residents, they can transform communities for the better. As an electricity supplier to small businesses, we want to see them flourish,” Morgan continued. “We’re passionate about helping young people and developing the next generation of professionals.” IEF

### **Ameren Illinois Warns Customers About Utility Scams**

Ameren Illinois is warning its business and residential customers to be on alert for utility scams. Posing as electric, water or natural gas company employees, scammers threaten to disconnect or shut off service if customers do not make an immediate payment by prepaid card or other non-traceable form of payment.

The company is seeing an increase in scam attempts during the COVID-19 pandemic, with scammers looking to use the situation to steal money and personal information from Ameren Illinois customers.

“The economic hardship caused by COVID-19 has left many customers vulnerable to these schemes,” said Mary Heger, Senior Vice President of Customer Experience, Ameren Illinois. Heger noted that Ameren Illinois has temporarily suspended service disconnections for non-payment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It is more important than ever that customers are vigilant in protecting themselves and their personal information.”

#### **Signs of potential scam activity**

- **Threat to disconnect:** Scammers may aggressively tell you that your utility bill is past due and service will be disconnected if a payment isn't made. Typically, the scammer will tell you that a disconnection will occur within an hour.
- **Request for immediate payment:** Scammers may instruct you to purchase a prepaid card. The scammer will ask you to return a call for immediate bill payment. When you return the scammer’s call, the scammer asks you for the number on the prepaid card. This allows the scammer to gain instant access to the card’s funds. In addition, scammers may ask you to download an app to make immediate payment, which you should avoid. IEF

## **NARUC Summer Policy Summit to be Virtual in July**

The National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) will hold its Summer Policy Summit from July 20-22, but this year the Summit will be virtual. State Commissioners and staff members from around the country will meet in various committees and subcommittees with an eye toward developing NARUC policy on several important issues of interest to the regulatory community.

Policies developed at the summer meetings may be acted upon at the NARUC annual meeting in Seattle in November. Registration for the virtual Summer Policy Summit is available at [www.naruc.org](http://www.naruc.org). IEF

## **NCSL Annual Meeting in Indianapolis is Cancelled**

The Annual Meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), which was scheduled for Aug. 10-13 in Indianapolis, Indiana, has been cancelled because of the ongoing COVID-19 national emergency. The NCSL's mission is to "improve state legislatures, foster communication among states and ensure a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system." Several Illinois legislators serve on key NCSL committees. The NCSL serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. It is funded by the states and governed by a 56-member executive committee. For more information go to [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org). IEF

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