

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPLAINT FILED) BY LORI BULT, CROOKS, SOUTH DAKOTA,) AGAINST NORTHERN STATES POWER) COMPANY REGARDING POOR CUSTOMER) SERVICE)	ORDER FINDING NO PROBABLE CAUSE AND CLOSING DOCKET EL98-020
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On October 1, 1998, the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) received a complaint filed by Lori Bult, Crooks, South Dakota (Complainant), against Northern States Power Company (NSP), regarding payment arrangements on a past due bill and the method in which the matter was handled by NSP. Complainant alleges that although assurances had been made to NSP by two assistance agencies, power was turned off. Complainant alleged a lack of communications within NSP and rude treatment by NSP personnel. Complainant asks that NSP's handling of accounts be examined, that it reopen its Sioux Falls office and that NSP personnel be better trained in human relations.

Pursuant to ARSD 20:10:01:08.01 and 20:10:01:09, if a complaint cannot be settled without formal action, the Commission shall determine if the complaint shows probable cause of an unlawful or unreasonable act, rate, practice or omission to go forward with the complaint.

On October 15, 1998, at its regularly scheduled meeting, the Commission considered this complaint along with presentations by the Complainant, Jim Wilcox, a representative of Northern States Power Company, and the recommendation of Commission Staff.

The Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to SDCL 49-34A-2, 49-34A-4, 49-34A-27, 49-34A-42, 49-34A-55, and ARSD 20:10:01:08.01, and 20:10:01:09. The Commission voted not to find probable cause, Commissioner Nelson dissenting. It is therefore

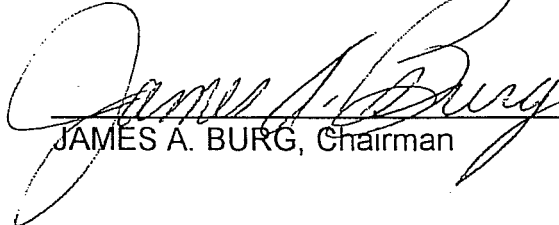
ORDERED, that no probable cause has been found in this matter. It is further

ORDERED, that this docket shall be closed.

Dated at Pierre, South Dakota, this 26th day of October, 1998.

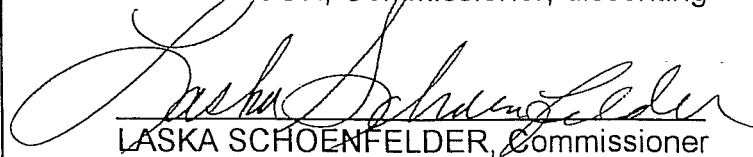
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE
The undersigned hereby certifies that this document has been served today upon all parties of record in this docket, as listed on the docket service list, by facsimile or by first class mail, in properly addressed envelopes, with charges prepaid thereon.
By: <u><i>Delaine Kacbo</i></u>
Date: <u>10/27/98</u>
(OFFICIAL SEAL)

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION:



JAMES A. BURG, Chairman

PAM NELSON, Commissioner, dissenting



LASKA SCHOENFELDER, Commissioner

Dissent of Commissioner Nelson
Docket EL98-020

I respectfully dissent from the decision reached in this matter that there is no probable cause that Northern States Power Company committed an unlawful or unreasonable act, rate, practice or omission.

From the presentation made to the Commission by the consumer, Lori Bult, it appears that several matters should have been looked into much closer and should have been the subject of a hearing where we could have considered sworn testimony and more detail. This all boils down to what we as a Commission can consider and that is the adequacy of service which Northern States Power Company provides its South Dakota customers.

For instance, there seems to be a large gap in the handling of information within the utility. When two assistance agencies provide assurances that money is forthcoming on a bill and a disconnection occurs anyway, something is wrong. To me we should have examined the internal controls within Northern States Power Company and found out exactly why this information was mishandled. Not only is this a disservice to the consumer, it has to be costly for the utility to disconnect service and then reconnect it again in a short time. Somebody is simply not paying attention to business and we have a duty to see why. It is obvious from staff's presentation that Northern States Power Company has changed its methods of operation even from the time that our consumer representative visited their call centers. This company should account to this Commission for this apparent instability.

Another major concern to me, and another reason I would vote to find probable cause, is the issue of the manner in which Northern States Power Company responds to its customers. While I realize the realities of the business world, I have serious questions about the level of training given to those who must respond on the telephone to those customers who have reason to deal with the company. That means that I would be interested to see how these employees are instructed to deal with facts such as those in this case. Also, it is incredible to me that, from the facts as we know them, the utility would fail to respond to requests to it to investigate the possible tapping into a customer's service by unknown parties or the fact that no "live" person was available to meet with a customer and deal with that customer's problems in Sioux Falls--the largest single service territory of this utility. It has been represented that this latter matter has been remedied now. However, that did not help Ms. Bult in this case. To me, this raises just another question of the management of this company in South Dakota.

When these types of charges are made they raise serious questions of adequacy of service and I feel strongly that we should hold a hearing to get to the bottom of these problems. Unless and until we do, these problems will not go away.



Pam Nelson, Commissioner