- BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF UTAH -	
In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power to Increase Rates by \$29.3 Million or 1.7 Percent through the Energy Balancing Account)) <u>DOCKET NO. 12-035-67</u>))
In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power for Approval of its Proposed Energy Cost Adjustment Mechanism)) <u>DOCKET NO. 09-035-15</u>)
In the Matter of the Rocky Mountain Power Proposed Schedule 94, Energy Balancing Account (EBA) Pilot Program Tariff) <u>DOCKET NO. 11-035-T10</u>))) <u>ORDER ON EBA INTERIM RATE</u>) <u>PROCESS</u>
)

ISSUED: August 30, 2012

SYNOPSIS

The Commission modifies the rate setting process in the Energy Balancing Account Pilot Program.

By the Commission:

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This matter is before the Commission in Docket No. 12-035-67, the application of

PacifiCorp ("Application"), a public utility doing business in Utah as Rocky Mountain Power

("RMP"), for authority to increase rates through the Energy Balancing Account ("EBA").¹ The

Application seeks recovery of approximately \$28.9 million in total deferred costs and interest,

¹ The Commission approved the EBA as a pilot program in March 2011. *See In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power for Approval of its Proposed Energy Cost Adjustment Mechanism*, Docket No. 09-035-15, Corrected Report and Order, March 3, 2011.

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comprised of the following two components: 1) \$20.0 million representing the first of three annual installments to facilitate recovery of certain previously-approved deferred net power costs ("NPC") for the period prior to October 2011;² and 2) \$8.9 million representing 70 percent of the difference between the forecast of EBA costs ("EBAC") in current base rates and the actual EBAC (i.e., the deferral account balance), for the period October 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011, including accrued interest.³

On May 14, 2012, the Commission convened a duly-noticed hearing in Docket No.

12-035-67 to examine the Application. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission authorized

its presiding officer to issue an order on the record approving the requested \$20.0 million rate

increase, effective June 1, 2012.⁴ The Commission deferred ruling on the \$8.9 million component of

the Application, pending the submission of briefs on the interim rate process, a component of the EBA

Pilot Program adopted in Docket No. 09-035-17.⁵ The Utah Industrial Energy Consumers ("UIEC"),

supported by the Utah Association of Energy Users ("UAE"), first challenged the EBA Pilot

Program's use of an interim rate process in comments on the Application filed May 10, 2012.⁶ In

evaluating the merits of UIEC's position, the Commission asked parties to brief two issues: 1) the

Commission's authority to apply an interim rate process as a component of EBA administration,

² See In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power for Authority to Increase its Retail Electric Utility Rates in Utah and for Approval of its Proposed Electric Service Schedules and Electric Service Regulations, Docket No. 10-035-124, et al., Report and Order, September 13, 2011 (approving the July 28, 2011 Settlement Stipulation).

³ The Application refers to \$9.3 million of fourth quarter 2011 EBA deferral account balance proposed for recovery; however, in a May 10, 2012 filing, RMP acknowledged two corrections to its calculations and reduced the EBA balance proposed for recovery to \$8.9 million. (See Rocky Mountain Power Comments on Division of Public Utilities Initial Comments and Recommendations, May 10, 2012, pp.5-7.)

⁴ This ruling was later memorialized in Docket No. 12-035-67, Report and Order, June 12, 2012.

⁵ See In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power for Approval of its Proposed Energy Cost

Adjustment Mechanism, Docket No. 09-035-15, Corrected Report and Order, March 3, 2011, p. 77.

⁶ See UIEC's Comments on the Division of Public Utilities' Initial EBA Comments and Recommendations, May 10, 2012, pp. 4-5.

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and 2) assuming authority exists, RMP's burden of proof in obtaining interim rate relief. Parties submitted the requested briefs on May 29, 2012 and presented oral argument on August 15, 2012. In this order, the Commission considers the first of these two issues and resolves UIEC's objections to the EBA Pilot Program's interim rate process.⁷

PARTIES' POSITIONS

I. RMP

RMP filed the Application on March 15, 2012, noting this is RMP's first request for a rate adjustment under "Electric Service Schedule 94, Energy Balancing Account (EBA) Pilot Program" ("Schedule 94") which governs operation of the EBA. RMP's proposed Schedule 94 was pending Commission approval in Docket No. 11-035-T10 when the Application was filed. The Application initially sought a June 1, 2012 effective date for the proposed \$8.9 million rate change. RMP requested the change on an interim basis, subject to further review, hearing, and possible refund. Consistent with the Commission's order approving the EBA Pilot Program⁸ ("EBA Order"), Schedule 94 states: "The EBA rate shall be implemented on an interim basis and shall remain in effect for the EBA Rate Effective Period. The interim rate shall become permanent upon a final order issued by the Commission."⁹ The

⁷ The Commission's disposition of the EBA interim rate process renders further consideration of the second issue unnecessary.

⁸ See In the Matter of the Application of Rocky Mountain Power for Approval of its Proposed Energy Cost Adjustment Mechanism, Docket No. 09-035-15, Corrected Report and Order, March 3, 2011.

⁹ "Electric Service Schedule 94, Energy Balancing Account (EBA) Pilot Program," Original Sheet 94.8, filed May 18, 2012.

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Commission approved (with modifications) proposed Schedule 94 on May 31, 2012, subject to a future order in Docket No. 12-035-67 resolving the interim rate process controversy.¹⁰

As described in RMP's opening brief, the EBA rate setting process RMP envisions includes the Division of Public Utilities ("Division") performing a preliminary review of RMP's application and accompanying testimony, and filing a report and recommendations. Parties would then have an opportunity to file comments on the application and report. Thereafter, the Commission would hold a hearing and set interim rates, assuming RMP had met its burden of presenting an adequate prima facie showing that the proposed rate change is justified. The interim rates would remain in effect until completion of the Division's audit report and further proceedings leading to the setting of final rates.¹¹ RMP believes the foregoing process is within the Commission's broad rate setting authority, as previously recognized by the Utah Supreme Court, and consistent with Commission precedent.

RMP argues the EBA is analogous to Questar Gas Company's Account No. 191 balancing account which employs interim rates pending completion of the Division's audit of the account for the time period in question. RMP reasons adopting an interim rate process for the EBA is within the Commission's powers, in part, because the Utah Supreme Court has acknowledged the validity of Account No. 191.¹² RMP quotes from a decision of the Court discussing the origin and purpose of Account No. 191.

¹⁰ See In the Matter of the Rocky Mountain Power Proposed Schedule 94, Energy Balancing Account (EBA) Pilot Program Tariff, Docket No. 11-035-T10, Order, May 31, 2012.

¹¹ See Rocky Mountain Power's Opening Brief Regarding Application of Interim Rate Process to EBA Deferral and Applicable Legal Standard, May 29, 2012, p. 3.

¹² Id. pp. 3-5.

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We presume, as we did in *Utah Department of Business Regulation v. Public Service Commission*, 720 P.2d 420 (Utah 1986), a case involving a similar type of account used by Utah Power and Light, that the Commission implemented this rate-changing mechanism under its "ample general power to fix rates and establish accounting procedures." We recognize that this power is not unlimited, and as we stated in the *EBA* case, the Commission has authority to set rates only in general rate proceedings ... [and has] limited authority to permit interim rate changes which are necessary because of unexpected increases in certain specific types of costs." 720 P.2d 420 at 423. We have held that this limited authority can be used pursuant to the fuel cost pass-through legislation, *see id.*, and in an abbreviated rate case, *see Utah Dep't of Bus. Regulation v. Pub. Serv. Comm.*, 614 P.2d 1242 (Utah 1980). We add the 191 balancing account mechanism to the list today, noting that any rate established by the Commission in any one of these proceedings must be just, reasonable, and sufficient. *Utah Code Ann.* § 54-4-4 (2000).¹³

RMP asserts its EBA is the same type of account as Questar's Account No. 191 and was adopted in the context of Account No. 191 in which an interim rate process has been employed for over 30 years. Like the EBA, Questar's balancing account was created by Commission order. It was created separately from the statute that establishes a process for interim "pass-through" of costs proposed for recovery in a general rate case.¹⁴ It was created, in part, to deal with potentially volatile fuel costs. Thus, in RMP's view, the interim rate process recognized in the *Questar* decision is equally lawful and appropriate to use with the EBA.¹⁵

The statutory authority for the EBA is Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-13.5 ("EBA

Statute"). RMP asserts this statute, while not explicitly authorizing an interim rate process, does not prohibit one and grants the Commission ample discretion to employ one. RMP points to the statute's use of the terms "surcredits," "surcharges," "reconciliation" and "balancing account" as

¹³ *Questar Gas Company v. Utah Public Service Commission*, 34 P.3d 218, ¶ 12.

¹⁴ *See* Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-12(4)(a).

¹⁵ See Supra n. 11, pp. 3-5.

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suggestive of, and consistent with, use of an interim rate process.¹⁶ According to RMP, because the EBA statute describes some but not all cost recovery methods, the Commission may use its general ratemaking powers "to fill in the gaps by adopting a specific mechanism to implement the cost recovery methods."¹⁷ Moreover, RMP maintains it was reasonable for the Commission to use the interim rate process specified elsewhere in Utah Code Title 54 (Public Utilities) for use in general rate cases, as a model upon which to base recovery of the EBA deferral account balance.

In support of its position, RMP also refers to the Commission's recent order implementing an interim surcredit in connection with RMP's renewable energy credits balancing account ("RBA").¹⁸ RMP argues the only difference between the interim rates it proposed for the RBA and those it proposed for the EBA is that the RBA interim rates benefit customers. RMP believes it is inappropriate to approve the RBA interim surcredit without also approving the EBA interim surcharge.¹⁹

Finally, RMP maintains UIEC is simply late in challenging an element of the EBA Pilot Program that was described in the EBA Order issued in March of 2011.²⁰

II. Division

The Division supports RMP's position and offers many of the same arguments. Like RMP, the Division believes the Commission's general powers to regulate every public

¹⁶ See Rocky Mountain Power's Response Brief Regarding Application of Interim Rate Process to EBA Deferral and Applicable Legal Standard, June 13, 2012, p. 8.
¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ See Docket No. 12-035-68, Report and Order, May 30, 2012.

¹⁹ See Supra n. 11, pp. 5-6.

²⁰ Id. p. 3.

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utility²¹ encompass the EBA's interim rate process. The Division argues these powers are particularly important in this instance where, in the Division's view, the EBA Statute is silent on the method of implementing EBA rate changes.²² Moreover, in the absence of specific direction in the EBA Statute, the Division maintains the Commission should look to analogous statutory provisions for guidance. The Division asserts Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-12 ("GRC Statute") provides this guidance.²³ The GRC Statute describes procedures for determining changes in base rates resulting in either a general rate decrease or a general rate increase. Subsection (4) of the GRC Statute establishes an interim rate process for general rate proceedings. Although such cases by definition focus only on base rates, and specifically exclude rate changes associated with balancing accounts (unless included by Commission order), the Division believes the interim rate process described in the GRC Statute should serve as a model for the Commission as it exercises its statutory authority to set EBA rates.²⁴

III. UIEC

UIEC's interpretation of the GRC Statute is very different. UIEC argues the interim rate process described in Subsection (4) cannot be extended to the EBA because the GRC Statute by definition excludes from its application the types of costs recovered through the EBA.²⁵ UIEC maintains this exclusion reflects legislative intent that EBA rate changes not be interim. UIEC notes the EBA Statute was enacted as Senate Bill 75 in 2009, without any reference to an interim rate process. According to UIEC, Senate Bill 75 also amended the GRC

²¹ See Utah Code Ann. § 54-4-1.
²² See Initial Brief of the Utah Division of Public Utilities, May 29, 2012, p. 5.

²³ See id. p. 5-6.

²⁴ See id. p. 8.

²⁵ See Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-12(1)

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Statute to make it clear the interim rate process provided for in the GRC Statute only applies to general rate changes, not to balancing accounts like the EBA. UIEC reasons the Legislature must have deliberately omitted providing for an interim rate process in the EBA Statute.²⁶

UIEC believes the EBA Statute, once enacted, became the only authority under which the Commission may authorize changes in rates to recover EBAC, outside of a general rate case. UIEC notes, the EBA Statute explicitly provides that a balancing account formed and maintained in accordance with its provisions does not constitute impermissible retroactive ratemaking.²⁷ UIEC implies the Commission may not expand upon the rate setting process explicit in the EBA Statute, without violating the retroactive ratemaking ban.²⁸ UAE shares this view, asserting Utah statutes and case law permit retroactive ratemaking only in a few narrow circumstances, including the GRC Statute's interim rate process and Questar's Account No. 191 balancing account mechanism. UAE states it can find no applicable exception to the retroactive ratemaking ban justifying use of an "interim or retroactively adjustable rate mechanism" in the EBA rate setting process.²⁹

UIEC maintains Questar's Account No. 191 interim rate process provides no authority to the Commission to apply such a process in recovering EBAC. UIEC argues the procedures applied to Account No. 191 have been in place for many years and have never been challenged. As noted above, in considering issues related to this Questar balancing account, the Utah Supreme Court has presumed it was implemented as a "rate-changing mechanism" under

²⁶ See Transcript of Hearing, August 15, 2012, p. 10. See also, UIEC's Response to Legal Briefs of Rocky Mountain Power and the Division of Public Utilities, June 13, 2013, p. 8.

²⁷ See Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-13.5(4)(c).

²⁸ See Legal Brief of UIEC, May 29, 2012, p. 5.

²⁹ See Brief of the Utah Association of Energy Users, May 29, 2012, pp. 1-2.

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the Commission's "ample general power to fix rates and establish accounting procedures."³⁰

UIEC asserts such pre-existing procedures afford no precedent where the ratemaking mechanism

has been defined by statute, as is the case with the EBA. In such a case, states UIEC, the

Commission's powers are limited to those specified in the statute, and any uncertainty about the

reach of those powers must be resolved against the exercise thereof.³¹

UIEC also argues the complexity of the issues related to EBAC recovery

renders the Account No.191 procedures inappropriate and inadequate in setting EBA rates.³²

UIEC asserts EBA issues are far more complex than those examined in connection with

Account No. 191. UIEC states:

In addition to fuel and purchased power, EBA accounts include revenue and expenses from the purchase and sale of transmission rights, natural gas, financial products, and multiple accounts and sub-accounts. All of these elements require separate reconciliation and prudence review. The enhanced opportunity for cost recovery makes the costs recovered under the EBA Statute more susceptible to review and challenge, requiring procedural mechanisms appropriate for addressing such challenges.³³

Noting the EBA Statute limits cost recovery to prudently incurred costs, UIEC points to financial product costs recoverable through the EBA as an important source of additional complexity and the need for increased scrutiny. UIEC contends:

³⁰ Supra n. 28, p. 7 (citing Questar Gas Company v. Utah Public Service Commission, 34 P.3d 218, ¶ 12).

³¹ See UIEC's Response to Legal Briefs of Rocky Mountain Power and the Division of Public Utilities, June 13, 2013, pp. 4-5 (quoting *Heber light & Power Co. v. Utah Pub.Serv. Comm'n*, 231 P.3d 1203, 1208 (Utah 2010)).

³² See Supra n. 28, pp. 7-8.

³³ Id. p. 8.

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The nature and magnitude of [EBA] costs far exceeds the costs ordinarily recovered through the 191 Account. There is also a difference in the nature of the risks that are being shifted to ratepayers in RMP's EBA. For the first time, ratepayers will pay for a utility's losses from the speculative financial trades of its managers who for far too long have been operating with minimal regulatory oversight. This shifting the risk to ratepayers requires vigilance from regulators beyond what might be required for the 191 Account.³⁴

Thus, UIEC maintains neither the GRC Statute nor the Account No. 191 interim rate procedures provide statutory authority or legal precedent to support an interim rate process for use with the EBA.

UIEC further argues any EBA rate change, even on an interim basis, must be preceded by formal hearings that comply with the Utah Administrative Procedures Act and Commission rules, including among other things adequate discovery and the opportunity to present evidence, cross examine, make argument, and submit motions.³⁵ In the absence of such procedures, UIEC asserts the Commission's order setting EBA rates could amount to an unconstitutional taking of property.³⁶

Finally, UIEC expresses concern about confusion it perceives to exist resulting from the inconsistent use of the term "interim." UIEC argues a rate set in accordance with the EBA Statute, although temporary, is not "interim" as that term is used in the GRC Statute. In UIEC's view, the interim rate described in the GRC Statute is an advance against the collection of a requested increase, while the increase is under Commission consideration. UIEC asserts

³⁴ Supra n. 31, pp. 15-16.

³⁵ See Utah Code Ann. §§ 63G-4-205(1), 63G-4-206(1)(d); Utah Admin. Code R746-100-5.

³⁶ See Supra n. 28, pp. 11-14.

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the Legislature provided for this practice during a period of steep inflation to avoid financial harm to the utility during the 240-day general rate case process. After adjudication, the interim rate is subsumed into the final rate, as dictated by the Commission's findings. UIEC argues no such factors compel interim rate setting in the EBA cost recovery process.³⁷

As UIEC interprets the EBA Statute, the EBA rate is set to recover or refund a fixed amount of EBAC. The EBA rate remains in place until the fixed amount is recovered and then terminates, subject to reconciliation to ensure the fixed amount has been recovered fully, but no more. UIEC believes the term "interim" has been used mistakenly to refer to the EBA rate process because it occurs outside of a general rate case. UIEC argues the EBA rate is not "interim," nor does it become "final" as those terms are used in the GRC Statute.³⁸

DISCUSSION, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As we have noted in prior orders, the EBA is a pilot program. This Application is the first instance of our review of its operation. Since inception of this pilot program, we have stated our intent to establish and evaluate the various associated administrative procedures during the course of the pilot, as we, with the parties, gain experience with the EBA mechanism. The parties' briefs and arguments have caused us to re-evaluate the suitability of the interim rate process we provided for in the EBA Order, as a component of the EBA rate setting mechanism. We recognize interim ratemaking has served for decades as an effective component of our administration of Questar's Account No. 191. We have concluded, however, an interim rate process is not well suited for the EBA, as presently formulated.

³⁷ See id. p. 4.

³⁸ See id. p. 5.

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In our EBA Order, we excluded from the EBA mechanism the financial transactions, i.e., swap transactions, about which UIEC expresses so much concern. We determined such transactions should continue to be reviewed and approved in each general rate case, where the prudence of Company decisions is routinely assessed. In the RMP general rate case that followed the EBA Order, Docket No. 10-035-124, parties filed a Settlement Stipulation executed July 28, 2011 ("Stipulation"). Among its many terms, the Stipulation provided for the Commission to modify the EBA Order to remove the language excluding financial swap transactions from the EBA.³⁹ The parties to the Stipulation included all of the Stipulation and in so doing changed the EBA mechanism as the parties requested. It is now apparent this change has substantially increased the levels of complexity and controversy pertaining to an examination of EBAC, and an interim rate process is no longer practical or appropriate.

The EBA Statute states, "[a]n energy balancing account may not alter: (i) the standard for cost recovery; or (ii) the electrical corporation's burden of proof."⁴⁰ While we do not decide in this order how an EBA interim rate process could satisfy these requirements, it is apparent any reasonable process applied to the EBA, in its present form, likely would result in two rounds of litigation of the same controversial issues: first at the hearing to set the interim

³⁹ See Supra n. 2, Settlement Stipulation, July 28, 2011, ¶ 56.

⁴⁰ Utah Code Ann. § 54-7-13.5(2)(d).

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rates and again after the Division's audit report is completed. Even RMP concedes the interim rate process should include the opportunity for parties to contest RMP's interim rate showing, through adverse testimony and cross examination.⁴¹ Where, as in this instance, substantial controversy exists concerning at least one major element of the costs in question, i.e., the swap transactions, significant litigation of the same issues is predictable at both the interim and final rate setting stages. Moreover, nothing in the operation of the EBA Pilot Program to this point justifies this inefficiency.

In light of the foregoing factors, we conclude the interim rate process we initially ordered is no longer warranted. Instead, we will implement a process requiring only one annual rate change, following completion of the Division's audit. Accordingly, we hereby remove the interim rate process from the EBA Pilot Program and set forth in this order the process by which the \$8.9 million proposed for recovery in this docket will be examined and recovered in rates, to the extent it is shown to be a prudently incurred actual cost. We also outline procedural milestones for examining future EBA applications.

On the date of this order, we will issue in Docket No. 12-035-67 notice of a scheduling conference to establish the schedule for completing this docket. The schedule we adopt will adhere to the following procedural structure. The Division will file its audit report within 75 days of this order, accompanied by direct testimony presenting its findings and recommendations regarding the level and prudence of actual EBAC. We believe this timing is

⁴¹ See Transcript of Hearing, August 15, 2012, pp.29-30, 61-62.

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reasonable, since the application has already been on file for about five and one-half months.

We expect other parties interested in this docket have also been conducting discovery and

performing their own analysis of EBA data. They should be prepared to file their direct

testimony within about 30 days after receiving the Division's report. All parties will then have

about two weeks to file rebuttal, and an additional week to file surrebuttal. We will then hold a

hearing with the goal of issuing an order setting EBA rates by year end.

We adopt the following procedural milestones for future EBA applications,

beginning with RMP's 2013 EBA filing.

- 1. RMP will file its application on or about March 15, as is the current practice.
- 2. The Division will complete its audit report and supporting testimony by July 15.
- 3. All intervenors may conduct discovery, with a 14 day turn around, beginning March 15.
- 4. Shortly after RMP files its application, the Commission will notice a scheduling conference to determine a schedule for the filing of testimony by intervenors (including rebuttal and surrebuttal by all parties) that will allow hearings on the application to be completed by September 15.
- 5. Any rate change necessary to recover or refund an EBA balance will take effect on or before November 1 of the year the application is filed.

We recognize this approach will place on the Division the added burden of a fixed

schedule for producing its audit report and direct testimony regarding prudently-incurred actual

costs. This consequence, however, is mitigated by the fact RMP files EBA account data

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monthly, so the audit process can begin far in advance of RMP's formal application.⁴² In our judgment the impacts of this schedule are appropriate given the nature and magnitude of the costs at issue. We also conclude this procedural schedule will fairly balance RMP's interest in timely cost recovery, customers' interest in timely refunds, and intervenor's interest in examining the balancing account entries and the underlying NPC.

ORDER

- The interim rate component of the EBA rate mechanism described on page 77 of the EBA Order is hereby superseded by the rate setting process milestones described above in this order.
- Within forty-five days, RMP shall file a revised Schedule 94 deleting the reference to an interim rate process and inserting in general terms the rate setting process described in this order for future RMP applications, beginning in 2013.
- The Commission will hold a scheduling conference in Docket No. 12-035-67, at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11, 2012, in Room 401, Heber M. Wells Building, 160 East 300 South, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴² See Supra n. 1, p. 78. See also Docket No. 09-035-15, Report and Order on EBA Filing Requirements and Pilot Program Evaluation Plan, June 15, 2012, p.13.

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DATED at Salt Lake City, Utah this 30th day of August, 2012.

/s/ Ted Boyer, Chairman

/s/ Ric Campbell, Commissioner

/s/ Ron Allen, Commissioner

Attest:

/s/ Gary L. Widerburg Commission Secretary D#233223

Notice of Opportunity for Agency Review or Rehearing

Pursuant to Utah Code Ann. §§ 63G-4-301 and 54-7-15, a party may seek agency review or rehearing of this order by filing a request for review or rehearing with the Commission within 30 days after the issuance of the order. Responses to a request for agency review or rehearing must be filed within 15 days of the filing of the request for review or rehearing. If the Commission fails to grant a request for review or rehearing within 20 days after the filing of a request for review or rehearing, it is deemed denied. Judicial review of the Commission's final agency action may be obtained by filing a Petition for Review with the Utah Supreme Court within 30 days after final agency action. Any Petition for Review must comply with the requirements of Utah Code Ann. §§ 63G-4-401, 63G-4-403, and the Utah Rules of Appellate Procedure.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on the 30th day of August, 2012, a true and correct copy of the foregoing Order on EBA Interim Rate Process was served upon the following as indicated below:

By Electronic Mail:

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