

May 3, 2021

Will Seuffert
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

—Via Electronic Filing—

RE: REPLY COMMENTS AND ANSWER TO PETITION FOR RECONSIDERATION 2021 TRUE-UP MECHANISMS AND RATE CASE STAY OUT DOCKET NOS. E002/M-20-743 AND E002/GR-20-723

Dear Mr. Seuffert:

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, submits these Reply Comments pursuant to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's *Notice of Comment Period* issued April 2, 2021 in the above-noted dockets.

We appreciate this opportunity to respond to the April 22, 2021 Comments of the Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department); Office of the Attorney General, Residential Utilities Division (OAG); Suburban Rate Authority (SRA) and Xcel Large Industrials (XLI) concerning whether the Commission should reconsider its approval¹ of the Company's 2021 True-Up proposal² and withdrawal of its 2020 electric rate case application³ in consideration of the March 3, 2021 letter in the present dockets identifying a \$43 million overstatement of the Company's revenue requirement and requested interim rates.

We thank the OAG and SRA for their ongoing support of our proposal, and the Department for recommending continued Commission approval of the true-up mechanisms extension and rate case stay out. The Department continues to

¹ In the Matter of the Petition of Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy for Approval of 2021 True-Up Mechanisms, Docket No. E002/M-20-743, ORDER APPROVING TRUE-UPS WITH MODIFICATIONS AND REQUIRING XCEL TO WITHDRAW ITS NOTICE OF CHANGE IN RATES AND INTERIM RATE PETITION (April 2, 2021) (the "Order").

² PETITION, Docket Nos. E,G999/CI-20-492, E,G002/M-20-716 (September 16, 2020), Docket No. E002/M-20-743 (October 1, 2020).

³ In the Matter of the Application of Northern States Power Company for Authority to Increase Rates for Electric Service in the State of Minnesota, APPLICATION, Docket Nos. E002/GR-20-723, E002/M-20-748 (November 2, 2020).

recommend that the rate mitigation it previously proposed is needed to limit the impact of the sales true-up on the Demand Class. We continue to believe, however, that this proposed mitigation is unnecessary given that average Demand Class bills have remained flat in recent years after accounting for sales true-ups, which we discuss further below. The Department has shown no reason why the proposed true-up for 2021 should be any different, and the Company's inadvertent overstatement of its revenue requirement in our rate case filing does not justify a different result. We do not, however, object to the Department's recommendation that we hire an independent auditor to review the Company's data validation procedures and resulting revenue requirement deficiency in our next rate case.

The only party suggesting that the Commission reconsider its April 2 Order is XLI. We respond to XLI's petition for reconsideration below and reiterate our position that, even in light of Company's inadvertent overstatement of the revenue requirement in the electric rate case filed in Docket No. E002/GR-20-723, the Order approving the Stay Out Proposal remains in the public interest, presents the best option for our customers, and should not be reconsidered.

Petitions for reconsideration are governed by Minn. Stat. § 216B.27, Subd. 3, which permits reconsideration of Commission decisions if they are "in any respect unlawful or unreasonable." Minn. R. 7829.3000 sets forth additional procedural requirements for petitions for reconsideration, and requires that petitions "set forth specifically the grounds relied upon or errors claimed." Generally, the Commission will review petitions for reconsideration "to determine whether the petition (i) raises new issues, (ii) points to new and relevant evidence, (iii) exposes errors or ambiguities in the underlying order, or (iv) otherwise persuades the Commission that it should rethink its decision."

XLI's petition fails to satisfy this standard and should be denied. Each of XLI's arguments has previously been raised and considered by the Commission in this docket, and XLI has identified no relevant evidence that should impact the Commission's decision nor any legal errors in the Commission's Order requiring its reconsideration.

First, XLI argues the Order violates Minn. Stat. § 216B.03 because—XLI claims—Demand Class customers would have fared better under a rate case. XLI raised this argument in both its initial and reply comments,⁵ and the Commission addressed it in

⁴ ORDER DENYING RECONSIDERATION, DENYING STAY, AND APPROVING COMPLIANCE FILINGS, Docket No. E002/M-18-643, at 3 (October 7, 2019).

⁵ XLI INITIAL COMMENT, Docket Nos. E002/GR-20-723, E002/M-20-743, at 4 (November 12, 2020) ("XLI Initial Comment"); XLI REPLY COMMENT, Docket Nos. E002/GR-20-723, E002/M-20-743, at 2 (November 17, 2020) ("XLI Reply Comment").

the Order. As stated in the Order, the Commission "careful[ly] consider[ed] . . . the issues raised in this case" and determined that "on balance, granting the Company's petition with modifications offers the broadest protection to ratepayers as a whole and will ensure just and reasonable rates." The Commission went on to state:

> In response to claims that the Demand class would fare better under a rate case proceeding, the Commission cautions that those assertions do not fully account for the fact that the outcome of either an interim rates decision or a final rates decision is speculative. Any potential reduction to either interim or final rates is unknown.

XLI has identified no new and relevant evidence that undermines this determination. In fact, as XLI notes, based on updated information since the Order was issued, leaving the Order in place would "maintain the \$10 million delta between the 2021 True-Up and the updated 2021 Rate Case interim-rate increase for Demand-Billed customers."7

In support of this argument, XLI further claims that the sales true-up approved by the Commission is unfair because "Demand-Billed customers will fund about 75% (or roughly \$15 million) of the 2021 True-Up Refund to residential customers." This argument entirely misconstrues the nature and purpose of the sales true-up, which is to ensure each class of customer continues to pay their appropriate share of fixed costs. The sales true-up has been very effective in that regard, as can be seen in Table 1 below. Since 2016, the total number of Large C&I customers has remained stable and so have those customers' average monthly bills, which include all prior sales true-ups. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, the overall impact to Large C&I bills has been relatively flat over the past five years, and in fact declined in 2020. Therefore, Demand-Billed customers are not "funding" any portion of residential customers' refunds; they are simply paying their share of the system's fixed costs.

⁶ Order at 11.

⁷ XLI PETITION FOR RECONSIDERATION AND INITIAL COMMENT, Docket Nos. E002/GR-20-723; E002/M-20-743 at 7 (April 22, 2021) ("XLI Reconsideration Petition").

Table 1
Large C&I Average Bills
(C&I Customers with demand greater than or equal to 1 MW)

	Revenue	Sales	Customers	Average Bill
Year	Millions of \$	MWh	Count	(\$/Month)
2016	\$631.9	8,159,584	503	104,665
2017	\$634.2	8,090,294	504	104,826
2018	\$661.4	8,127,676	506	109,037
2019	\$611.5	7,621,916	506	100,796
2020	\$580.3	7,004,313	502	96,428
2021	\$630.6	6,879,829	501	104,893

Second, XLI once again argues the Order is an impermissible extension of the Company's last multiyear rate plan under Minn. Stat. § 216B.16, subd. 19(a). XLI raised this argument in both its initial and reply comments, and the Commission fully addressed it in the Order (as well as its 2020 Order approving the Company's prior true-up proposal). In both cases, the Commission correctly found that approval of the Stay Out Proposal does not violate the multiyear rate plan statute. In its 2020 Order approving the Company's prior true-up proposal, the Commission noted that the multiyear rate plan, established in the Company's 2015 electric rate case, 10 had been "completed" and the true-up proposal was "not offered as a settlement to an existing rate filing, but as an alternative to taking up a rate proceeding at this time." In other words, the proposal was for "maintaining the status quo upon the conclusion of a Commission-approved multiyear rate plan established under Minn. Stat. § 216B.16, subd. 19," and not extending the multiyear rate plan. Likewise, in this docket, the Commission concluded that it "is not persuaded that approval of the Stay Out Proposal violates the multiyear rate plan statute." XLI has not identified any evidence to support the Commission's reconsideration of this issue, which has now been decided by the Commission the same way in each of the past two years. 12

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⁸ XLI Initial Comment at 5; XLI Reply Comment at 5.

⁹ Order at 11-12.

¹⁰ In the Matter of the Application of Northern States Power Company for Authority to Increase Rates for Electric Service in the State of Minnesota, Docket No. E002/GR-15-826.

¹¹ ORDER APPROVING TRUE-UPS AND REQUIRING XCEL TO WITHDRAW ITS NOTICE OF CHANGE IN RATES AND INTERIM RATE PETITION at 3, 7, Docket No. E002/M-19-688 (March 13, 2020).

¹² XLI's related claim that the sales true-up is a perpetual rate rider that inappropriately shifts risk to Demand Class customers is similarly without merit. As shown above in Table 1, Demand Class customers have not born inordinate risk as a result of the Commission's prior approvals of sales true-ups, and the Order approving this sales true-up should be no different. Moreover, there is nothing perpetual about the one-year sales true-up approved by the Commission's Order.

Third, XLI argues that the Order violates Minn. Stat. § 216C.05, subd. 2, which states "[i]t is the energy policy of the state of Minnesota that," among other things "retail electricity rates for each customer class be at least five percent below the national average." Once again, XLI raised this argument in its reply comments. 13 The Commission carefully considered this argument and the impact of both the Stay Out Proposal and interim rates on all parties and concluded that:

> Avoiding an immediate interim rate increase for any customer class reduces the risk of additional economic hardship and service disconnections to individuals, families, and businesses already experiencing financial strain as a result of the pandemic. This level of certainty is the most reasonable and equitable course of action under these uniquely compelling and unforeseen circumstances.¹⁴

This finding, made after reviewing briefing from all parties, and several days of oral argument and Commissioner questions, is consistent with the Commission's obligation to ensure that every rate is "just and reasonable." 15 XLI's invocation of Section 216C.05 does not change this conclusion. That statute lays out the state's "vital interest" in providing for "increased efficiency in energy consumption, the development and use of renewable energy resources wherever possible, and the creation of an effective energy forecasting, planning, and education program." To that end, the statute includes a handful of specific "energy policy goals" related to annual energy savings, fossil fuel reductions, and renewable resource development. As noted by XLI, in addition to these specific goals, the statute includes an affordability goal that was added in 2017. But this is not a requirement for the Commission to apply when setting rates. Instead, it is a goal to be considered alongside other goals when the state is engaged in energy planning and does not justify the Commission's reconsideration of its Order in this docket.

In fact, on March 9, 2021, the Commission held a special planning meeting to assist it in monitoring retail electric prices consistent with Section 216C.05, subd. 2. In that meeting, the Commission reviewed the average monthly bills of the Company, Minnesota Power, and Ottertail Power, comparing them on a residential, commercial, and industrial class basis to the rates of other utilities in Minnesota and across the nation. Among other things, this review showed that—consistent with Table 1 above—the Company's rates across all classes have been very stable for the last 15 years, with residential rates growing at 0.5%, commercial rates growing at 0.3%, and industrial rates growing at 0.2% in real dollars from 2005 through 2019. This analysis

¹³ XLI Reply Comment at 3.

¹⁴ Order at 13.

¹⁵ Minn. Stat. § 216B.03.

further demonstrates that Large C&I customers in Minnesota have not unfairly shouldered a disproportionate amount of costs or rate increases. In fact, as the Commission's review showed, industrial customers have experienced the lowest amount of rate growth compared to any other customer class from 2005 through 2019.

In sum, XLI has raised no new issues, presented no new and relevant evidence, and identified no errors or ambiguities in the Commission's Order. For those reasons, XLI's request for reconsideration should be denied.

We have electronically filed this document with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and copies have been served on the parties on the attached service lists. Please contact me at allen.krug@xcelenergy.com or Amy Liberkowski at amy.a.liberkowski@xcelenergy.com if you have any questions regarding this filing.

Sincerely,

/s/

ALLEN D. KRUG ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, STATE REGULATORY POLICY

c: Service Lists

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Lynnette Sweet, hereby certify t	that I have this day	served copies	of the foregoing
document on the attached list of	persons.		

- <u>xx</u> by depositing a true and correct copy thereof, properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States mail at Minneapolis, Minnesota
- xx electronic filing

Docket No. E002/M-20-743

Docket No. E002/GR-20-723

Dated this 3rd day of May 2021

/s/

Lynnette Sweet Regulatory Administrator

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