

# Opinions of ComEd and Ameren Customers Ages 50+ in Illinois on House Bill 14: An AARP Survey



By Jennifer H. Sauer, AARP

The Illinois state office of AARP commissioned this survey to explore the views of electric and gas customers ages 50 and older from two companies that are specific to House Bill 14 – Commonwealth Edison (ComEd) and Ameren. Concern about and experience with electric and gas rates and support for specific features of the bill are tested in this survey. According to ComEd's website, the company currently services about 70 percent of the state's population or 3.8 million customers in Illinois.<sup>1</sup> Ameren currently serves about 2.4 million electric customers and about 900,000 natural gas customers.<sup>2</sup> If passed, HB 14 could result in less state oversight, fewer consumer protections, and more frequent automatic rate increases for ComEd and Ameren customers and perhaps ultimately for customers of other natural gas companies in the state. There are approximately 3,977,245 persons age 50+ in Illinois and many of them, particularly those with lower incomes, could be affected by this bill if passed.

The results of this phone survey are based on a random sample of Illinois residents age 50+ who indicated they were customers of either ComEd or Ameren. The survey was fielded March 21 - April 7, 2011, and a total of 804 interviews were completed yielding a margin of error of  $\pm 3.5$  percent. An annotated survey of all responses begins on page 4, and detailed methodology is on page 3.

## Survey-in-Brief

- ❖ **JUST OVER HALF (54%) OF ALL CUSTOMERS SURVEYED WOULD STRONGLY (29%) OR SOMEWHAT (26%) SUPPORT LEGISLATION REQUIRING ComEd and AMEREN TO MAKE EXTRA FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND ELECTRIC GRID IMPROVEMENTS BEYOND WHAT IS REQUIRED BY LAW.**
- ❖ **HOWEVER, MOST (78%) ComEd and AMEREN CUSTOMERS SURVEYED WOULD STRONGLY (62%) OR SOMEWHAT (16%) OPPOSE ADDITIONAL ANNUAL AUTOMATIC RATE INCREASES TO HELP PAY FOR THOSE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ELECTRIC GRID IMPROVEMENTS BEYOND WHAT IS ALREADY REQUIRED BY LAW.**
- ❖ **THE MAJORITY (72%) OF CUSTOMERS SURVEYED WOULD STRONGLY (54%) OR SOMEWHAT (18%) OPPOSE ALLOWING OTHER NATURAL GAS COMPANIES THAT SERVE ComEd CUSTOMERS LIKE NORTH SHORE, NICOR, OR PEOPLE'S GAS TO IMPOSE SIMILAR ADDITIONAL RATE INCREASES FOR THE SAME EXTRA INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE.**
- ❖ **ComEd AND AMEREN CUSTOMERS OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSE (Strongly oppose: 70%; Somewhat oppose: 13%) ALLOWING ELECTRIC AND GAS COMPANIES TO BEGIN AUTOMATIC RATE INCREASES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND GRID IMPROVEMENTS BEFORE THE ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION (ICC) HAS COMPLETED A FULL REVIEW OF THEIR REQUEST FOR THOSE RATE INCREASES.**
- ❖ **A MAJORITY (82%) OF CUSTOMERS SURVEYED OPPOSE (STRONGLY OPPOSE: 71%; SOMEWHAT OPPOSE: 12%) NO LONGER REQUIRING ComEd AND AMEREN OR RELATED ELECTRIC AND GAS COMPANIES TO JUSTIFY THEIR REQUESTS TO THE ICC FOR AUTOMATIC INCREASES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND GRID IMPROVEMENTS.**

<sup>1</sup> ComEd, An Exelon Company, Profile <https://www.comed.com/sites/aboutcomed/Pages/profiles.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Ameren number of electric customers, see <http://www.ameren.com/Media/Pages/FactsaboutAmeren.aspx> ; Number of Natural Gas companies, see <http://www.ameren.com/Media/AboutAmeren/Pages/AboutUs.aspx>

- ❖ **THE MAJORITY (78%) OF CUSTOMERS SURVEYED SAY IT IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT (Extremely important: 36%; Very important: 42%) TO THEM THAT ILLINOIS STRENGTHEN CONSUMER PROTECTIONS AROUND UTILITY RATES AND SERVICE, WITH ANOTHER ONE IN SEVEN (15%) SAYING IT IS SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT TO THEM.**
- ❖ **MOST (66%) CUSTOMERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE COST OF THEIR ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS GOING UP.**
  - ✓ Two-thirds of customers surveyed say they are extremely (37%) or very (29%) concerned about the costs of their electricity going up, with another one in five say they are somewhat concerned. Similarly, those with natural gas service express the same levels of concern about the costs of this utility going up (Extremely/Very concerned: 65%; Somewhat concerned: 21%).
- ❖ **NEARLY SIX IN TEN (58%) OF ALL CUSTOMERS SURVEYED THINK THEY PAY TOO MUCH FOR ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS AND IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS THEY SAY THEIR ELECTRIC AND NATURAL GAS BILL HAS GONE UP.**
  - ✓ Fifty-eight percent of all customers surveyed say the amount they currently pay for electricity is too much, while just under four in ten (37%) say the amount they pay for this utility is about right. Only one percent says the amount they pay for electricity is too little. Those with natural gas services express similar opinions (Too much: 56%; About right: 40%; Too little: 1%).
- ❖ **MANY (58%) CUSTOMERS SURVEYED DO NOT AGREE THAT THEIR ELECTRIC COMPANY HAS THE CUSTOMER'S BEST INTERESTS IN MIND.**
  - ✓ Nearly six in ten customers strongly (35%) or somewhat (23%) disagree that their electric company has the customer's best interests in mind. However, one-quarter think otherwise with seven percent saying they strongly agree and two in ten (19%) saying they somewhat agree that their electricity company has the customer's best interests in mind.
- ❖ **MOST ELECTRIC (77%) AND MOST NATURAL GAS (79%) CUSTOMERS SURVEYED DO NOT BELIEVE THEIR STATE ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE DOING ENOUGH TO LOWER THE COST OF THEIR ELECTRIC OR NATURAL GAS BILLS.**
- ❖ **MOST (62%) CUSTOMERS SURVEYED SAY THEY WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE FOR STATE OFFICE WHO COMMITS TO PREVENTING ELECTRIC AND NATURAL GAS COMPANIES FROM CHARGING UNREASONABLE RATES TO CUSTOMERS. HOWEVER, THEY ARE SOMEWHAT DIVIDED ON VOTING FOR CANDIDATE WHO WOULD REDUCE OVERSIGHT OF ELECTRIC AND NATURAL GAS COMPANIES (More likely to vote for candidate: 33%; Less likely to vote for candidate: 36%; Makes no difference: 22%).**

## **Methodology**

The AARP Illinois Utility survey obtained telephone interviews with a sample of 804 respondents aged 50 and older drawn at random from the state of Illinois. The interviews were conducted by Woelfel Research, Inc. from March 21 to April 7, 2011. Given the specific mention in House Bill 14, the respondents were screened so that their reported utility company was either ComEd or Ameren. The margin of sampling error for the random sample of 804 is  $\pm 3.5\%$ . The response rate for the RDD study was 40 percent and the cooperation rate was 92%. See AAPOR Outcome Rate Calculator Version 2.1 May 2003. The data reported here are not weighted since there are no reliable population figures for 50+ households using ComEd and/or Ameren.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-one percent of the sample described here are self reported ComEd Customers and 39 percent said they use Ameren.

This study also included oversamples of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino Illinois residents ages 50 and older who were screened so that their reported utility company was either ComEd or Ameren. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by Woelfel Research, Inc. Woelfel Research, Inc. conducted the interviews for these oversamples in English and Spanish from March 21 to April 11, 2011

This summary only describes the findings from the RDD residents living in Illinois who are customers of ComEd and Ameren. Separate summaries are available describing the responses of the Black/African American utility customers and the Hispanic/Latino utility customers living in Illinois.

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<sup>3</sup> While no demographic data could be found on specific utility customers in Illinois, weighting back to the state population by age and gender was tried to see if responses to survey questions would change and by how much. Nearly all survey responses albeit age and gender are the same between weighted and unweighted and those that changed did so by 2 percent or less.

# **ANNOTATED QUESTIONNAIRE**

**2011 AARP Survey of ComEd and Ameren Customers ages 50+  
[n= 804, Margin of Error = ±3.5 percent ]**

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**INTRODUCTION/SCREENER**

Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from Woelfel Research, Inc., a national opinion research firm. We are not telemarketers and are not trying to sell you anything. We would like to find out your opinions on utility service in Illinois. Your views are important and we would greatly appreciate your participation. All your responses will be kept entirely confidential.

S1. Our study is interested in the opinions of certain age groups. Could you please tell me your age as of your last birthday? [IN YEARS] \_\_\_\_\_ [RECORD ACTUAL AGE AND USE THE AGE GROUPS BELOW TO KEEP TRACK OF HOW MANY RESPONDENTS WE ARE GETTING IN EACH GROUP]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
50-64	49
65 or older	52

S2. And just to confirm, are you a resident of Illinois?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Yes	100
No	-

**[NOTE TO VENDOR: ROUGHLY ABOUT 75% OF Illinois RESIDENTS GET THEIR ELECTRICITY FROM Commonwealth Edison and about 800,000 get it from Ameren, and then less than 100,000 get their electric from MidAmerican. We might want to set some QUOTAS TO BE SURE WE GET A GOOD SAMPLING FROM EACH GROUP.]**

S3. From what company do you receive your electric bill? [DO NOT READ – RECORD ANSWER]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Ameren	39
Commonwealth Edison or “ComEd”	61
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	-
Refused [DO NOT READ]	-

S4. From what company do you receive your natural gas bill? [DO NOT READ – RECORD ANSWER]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Ameren	29
North Shore Gas	3
Nicor Gas	48
Do not use or have natural gas	19

### Main Questionnaire

Q1. How concerned are you about the costs of your electricity going up? Are you extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Extremely concerned	37
Very concerned	29
Somewhat concerned	20
Not very concerned	8
Not at all concerned	5
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	1
Refused [DO NOT READ]	-

[SKIP Q2 IF QS4=DO NOT USE NATURAL GAS IN HOME]

Q2. And how concerned are you about the costs of your natural gas going up? Are you extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned?

Base: Natural gas user	RDD
	N=650
	%
Extremely concerned	33
Very concerned	32
Somewhat concerned	21
Not very concerned	8
Not at all concerned	6
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	1
Refused [DO NOT READ]	-

Q3. Thinking about the amount you currently pay for electricity, is this amount .... [INTERVIEWER READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Too little	1
About right	37
Too much	58
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	4
Refused [DO NOT READ]	<0.5

**[SKIP Q4 IF QS4=DO NOT USE NATURAL GAS IN HOME]**

Q4. And what about the amount you currently pay for natural gas, is this amount .... [INTERVIEWER READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Natural gas user	RDD
	N=650
	%
Too little	1
About right	40
Too much	56
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	4
Refused [DO NOT READ]	-

Q5. In the past 12 months, has your electric bill.... [INTERVIEWER READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Gone down	6
Gone up	55
Stayed the same	32
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	7
Refused [DO NOT READ]	<0.5

**[SKIP Q6 IF QS4=DO NOT USE NATURAL GAS IN HOME]**

Q6. And what about your **natural gas** bill – in the past 12 months has this..... [INTERVIEWER READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Natural gas user	RDD
	N=650
	%
Gone down	7
Gone up	47
Stayed the same	38
Do not use natural gas in my home/do not have a gas bill [DO NOT READ]	-
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	8
Refused [DO NOT READ]	-

Q7. Do you agree or disagree that your electric company has the customer’s best interests in mind? And do you strongly or somewhat agree/disagree?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly agree	7
Somewhat agree	19
Neither agree or disagree [DO NOT READ]	6
Somewhat disagree	23
Strongly disagree	35
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	9
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q8. Do you believe your state elected officials are doing enough to lower the cost of your electric bills?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Yes	9
No	77
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	14
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

[SKIP Q9 IF QS4=DO NOT USE NATURAL GAS IN HOME]



Q9. And do you believe your state elected officials are doing enough to lower the cost of your natural gas bills?

Base: Natural gas user	RDD
	N=650
	%
Yes	7
No	79
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	13
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q10: How important is it to you that Illinois strengthen consumer protections around utility rates and service? Would you say this is extremely important to you, very important to you, somewhat important to you, not that important, or not at all important to you?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Extremely important	36
Very important	42
Somewhat important	15
Not that important	2
Not important at all	2
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	3
Refused [DO NOT READ]	<0.5

## **LEGISLATION QUESTIONS**

**Now I'd to get your opinion regarding a legislation pending in Illinois around utility rates.**

### **Modernization**

Q11. Current law in Illinois requires electric companies to keep their power lines in top working order. However, legislation has been proposed to require two utility companies, Commonwealth Edison (or "ComEd") and Ameren, to make *extra* financial investments to infrastructure and electric grid improvements over the next 10 years. Do you support or oppose legislation requiring these companies to make *extra financial* investments to infrastructure and electric grid improvements beyond what is already required by law? And do you strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly support	29
Somewhat support	26
Neither support or oppose [DO NOT READ]	6
Somewhat oppose	12
Strongly oppose	14
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	13
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q12. To help pay for the additional infrastructure improvements, ComEd customers could be paying \$2.6 billion or more, and Ameren customers about \$570 million or more, in annual automatic increases over the next 10 years. These rate increases would be in addition to any other increases to charge and delivery service rates. Do you support or oppose these annual automatic rate increases for infrastructure and electric grid improvements? And do you strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly support	4
Somewhat support	8
Neither support or oppose [DO NOT READ]	3
Somewhat oppose	16
Strongly oppose	62
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	7
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q13. Also under this proposal, natural gas companies that serve ComEd customers, such as North Shore, Nicor, or People's Gas, that also agree to make *extra* financial investments to their infrastructure would be allowed to impose similar additional rate increases. Do you support or oppose this part of the legislation? And do you strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly support	4
Somewhat support	9
Neither support or oppose [DO NOT READ]	5
Somewhat oppose	18
Strongly oppose	54
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	8
Refused [DO NOT READ]	2

## ICC and Consumer Protection

The Illinois Commerce Commission (or the ICC) provides public information on utility issues, resolves customer issues and utility disputes, and ensures reasonable utility rates and reliable utility service. The proposed legislation to require ComEd, Ameren and related natural gas companies to improve their infrastructure and electric grids, would also change how this commission operates.

Q14. One change includes allowing these electric and gas companies to begin automatic rate increases for infrastructure and grid improvements ***before*** the state commerce commission has completed a full review of their request for those rate increases. Do you support or oppose this change? And do you strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly support	3
Somewhat support	4
Neither support or oppose	3
[DO NOT READ]	
Somewhat oppose	13
Strongly oppose	70
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	6
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q15. This proposed legislation would also **no longer** require these companies to justify their requests for automatic rate increases for infrastructure and grid improvements to the state commerce commission. Do you support or oppose this change? And do you strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Strongly support	4
Somewhat support	4
Neither support or oppose	2
[DO NOT READ]	
Somewhat oppose	12
Strongly oppose	71
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	6
Refused [DO NOT READ]	1

Q16. If a candidate for state office in Illinois commits to preventing electric and natural gas companies from charging unreasonable rates to customers, would you be more likely to vote for the candidate, less likely or would it make no difference?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
More likely	62
Make no difference	18
Less likely	12
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	6
Refused [DO NOT READ]	2

Q17. If a candidate for state office in Illinois reduced oversight or regulation of electric and natural gas rates, would you be more likely to vote for the candidate, less likely or would it make no difference?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
More likely	33
Make no difference	22
Less likely	36
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	7
Refused [DO NOT READ]	2

## Demographics

**The following questions are for classification purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential.**

D1. RECORD RESPONDENT'S GENDER. ASK ONLY IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY: "To ensure it is recorded accurately, could you please state your gender?"

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Male	38
Female	62

D2. What is your current marital status? Are you.....[READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Married	54
Not married, living with your partner or significant other	3
Separated	1
Divorced	11
Widowed	21
Or are you currently single and never married	8
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	-
Refused [DO NOT READ]	3

D3. [IF D2 = 1 ASK: “Are you or your spouse currently a member of A-A-R-P?” IF D2 = 2 ASK: “Are you or your partner currently a member of AARP?” OTHERWISE ASK “Are you currently a member of AARP?”]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Yes	51
No	47
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	<0.5
Refused [DO NOT READ]	2

D4. What is the highest level of education that you completed? [READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
0 to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade, but with no diploma	7
High school graduate or equivalent	32
Post high school education, but with no degree	16
2 year degree	12
4 year degree	14
Post graduate study, but with no degree	5
Graduate or professional degree	11
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	-
Refused [DO NOT READ]	2

D5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

[READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Self-employed full-time	3
Self-employed part-time	3
Employed full-time	16
Employed part-time	7
Retired and not working at all	56
Unemployed and looking for work	4
Or are you not in the labor force for other reasons	9
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	<0.5
Refused [DO NOT READ]	3

D6. Do you own or rent your primary residence?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Own	82
Rent	14
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	1
Refused [DO NOT READ]	4

D7. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin or descent?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Yes	3
No	94
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	<0.5
Refused [DO NOT READ]	3

D8. What is your race? Are you....[READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
White or Caucasian	83
Black or African American	9
Native American or Alaskan Native	1
Asian	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<0.5
Or are you some other race? [Please specify]	2
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	<0.5
Refused [DO NOT READ]	4

D9. Thinking about your state elections for Illinois Governor and Legislators in the last 10 years, which of the following best describes your voting behavior? Would you say you vote always, most of the time, about half of the time, seldom, or would you say you never vote?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Always	59
Most of the time	23
About half of the time	6
Seldom	3
Never	5
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	1
Refused [DO NOT READ]	4

D10. Do you consider yourself to be a .... [INTERVIEWER READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Democrat	26
Republican	20
Independent	36
Other	5
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	4
Refused [DO NOT READ]	10

D11. How would you characterize your political views? Would you say you are....[READ AND RANDOMIZE EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Conservative	32
Moderate	30
Liberal	13
None of the above	14
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	5
Refused [DO NOT READ]	7

D12. What is your 5-digit zip code? \_\_\_\_ \_

D13. We realize income is a private matter and so rather than ask you anything specific about your income, I'd like to ask you to please stop me when I get to the category that includes your household's income before taxes in 2010. Was it...[READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

Base: Total respondents	RDD
	N=804
	%
Less than \$10,000	7
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	10
\$20,000 to less than \$35,000	13
\$35,000 to less than \$50,000	11
\$50,000 to less than \$60,000	9
\$60,000 to less than \$75,000	9
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	7
\$100,000 or more	10
Not sure [DO NOT READ]	3
Refused [DO NOT READ]	21

**Thank you and have a good night!**



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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social welfare organization with a membership that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to either political campaigns or candidates. We produce AARP The Magazine, the definitive voice for 50+ Americans and the world's largest-circulation magazine with over 35.1 million readers; AARP Bulletin, the go-to news source for AARP's millions of members and Americans 50+; AARP VIVA, the only bilingual U.S. publication dedicated exclusively to the 50+ Hispanic community; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. State Research brings the right knowledge at the right time to our state and national partners in support of their efforts to improve the lives of people age 50+.

State Research consultants provide strategic insights and actionable research to attain measurable state and national outcomes. The views expressed herein are for information, debate, and discussion, and do not necessarily represent official policies of AARP.

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**Research and Strategic Analysis**

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