



Montana Public Service Commission

Post Office Box 202601

Helena, MT 59620-2601

406.444.6199

<http://psc.mt.gov>

August 18, 2008 – *For Immediate Release*

For more information contact:

Chair Greg Jergeson, 406.444.6166

Public Information Specialist Sarah Carlson, 406.444.6171

**PSC Chair Challenges Energy and Natural Gas Suppliers
to Meet NorthWestern and Gubernatorial Efforts**

Since June, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has been alerting Montanans to expected higher winter heating bills due to the increased costs driven by the unregulated market prices of natural gas. Greg Jergeson, chair of the Montana PSC applauds NorthWestern Energy's \$500,000 donation to programs designed to help Montanans deal with higher energy costs, and urges unregulated natural gas and electricity suppliers to consider stepping up to the plate as well.

"NorthWestern's donation nicely complements Governor Schweitzer's recent release of \$1 million in emergency funds for low-income weatherization," noted Jergeson. "Taken together, all of these kinds of efforts will help more Montana families avoid unmanageable utility bills this coming winter. However, more really needs to be done given the dire situation many Montanans face," he added. The Montana Department of Health and Human Services reports a current backlog of more than 13,000 homes in the low-income weatherization program.

Jergeson is now calling on those he considers in the best position to offer assistance, the companies profiting from the current commodity market conditions, the unregulated electricity and natural gas suppliers. I'm sending a letter to the suppliers challenging them to consider matching NorthWestern's donation," Jergeson stated. "One of the largest outreach efforts at the PSC is urging Montanans to install conservation measures now, ahead of the winter heating season. Finding ways to help Montanans pay for that work is part of our focus too. That is why I am urging electricity and natural gas suppliers to consider donating to low-income weatherization and related programs," Jergeson concluded.

Made up of 5 elected commissioners, the PSC works to ensure that Montanans receive safe and reliable service from regulated public utilities while paying reasonable rates. Utilities regulated by the PSC generally include private investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies. In addition, the PSC regulates certain motor carriers, and oversees natural gas pipeline safety and intrastate railroad safety.

-- ### --