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ICC Launches NextGrid: Illinois Utility of the Future Study

Chicago, IL....Over 650 representatives from the energy and technology industries, including consumer advocates, academia, and government officials recently participated in the NextGrid: Illinois' Utility of the Future Study Launch Event at UIC Forum in Chicago. Expert panelists and speakers presented their visions of how Illinois can enhance energy delivery and power the technology and innovation revolution to promote greater economic growth and quality of life for all Illinoisans.

"NextGrid is an exciting first step towards a new chapter in Illinois' energy future. It will take bold innovation, creativity, forward thinking, and a willingness to challenge conventional methods to make the leap into a digital revolution that will reshape how we work and live," said Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) Chairman Brien J. Sheahan. "We are all aware of the obstacles that stand in the way of the kinds of innovation in energy delivery that this revolution demands. One of the biggest is a cumbersome regulatory structure that often slows and stifles progress, but I propose that maintaining a robust regulatory structure and fostering innovation and progress are not mutually exclusive. NextGrid is a perfect example of how government, academia, consumer and environmental advocates, and industry can work collaboratively to shape the future."

The Commission-led Utility of the Future Study comes as a follow up to a recommendation from Governor Bruce Rauner's transition committee to explore how advances in distributive resources, energy efficiency, smart devices, micro grids, electric vehicles, big data and analytics, and other innovations will all converge to shape the future of both utilities and consumers in Illinois and the Midwest.

A team of professors from the Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are the lead facilitators for the NextGrid Study. Professors Dr. George Gross and Dr. Peter Sauer from the ECE Department spoke to the group about their expectations for the NextGrid study.

"NextGrid is an 18-month long project that is very much customer focused. We want to get the stakeholders involved. We want to get the communities involved. We want to hear from everyone. The goals are basically to go out there and identify the critical issues, the challenges, and the opportunities that we see in the deployment of new technology; in terms of the policies we need, and to bring about increased customer participation and empowerment – essentially the democratization of the grid," said Gross.

ICC Commissioner Sherina Maye Edwards introduced the CEOs from the state's two largest electric providers, Ameren Illinois and Commonwealth Edison (ComEd), to present their perspectives on NextGrid.

"This is an exciting time in the energy industry. We are upgrading the electric grid at an unparalleled level and introducing new technologies in ways never before seen," said Richard J. Mark, chairman and president of Ameren Illinois. "I commend the ICC for initiating the NextGrid Utility of the Future study. Working together, we'll shape the future of energy development in Illinois by creating an environment that spurs innovation and delivers value to the customer."

"The Illinois Commerce Commission has positioned its NextGrid policy study to serve as a leading think tank on 21st century energy sector reinvention, addressing the industries' most significant issues on behalf of Illinois consumers," said Anne Pramaggiore, ComEd president and CEO. "We at ComEd are enthusiastic about the study and about the track record of collaboration and consensus-building that has been a hallmark of Illinois energy policy development over several decades."

Commissioner Robert F. Powelson from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission offered a national perspective in his keynote address. "With the right injection of innovation and know-how, the grid of the coming future should be at least and potentially even more cost effective than the continued investment that simply maintains today's status quo, while better serving the social and environmental preference of customers. I commend the works of this Commission."

Three expert panels offered individual presentations on a variety of topics. The first panel, moderated by Acting ICC Commissioner Sadzi Martha Oliva, was titled: *A Glimpse into the Future: Emerging Trends and Technologies on the Grid*. Panelists included: James Newcomb, managing director, Rocky Mountain Institute; Kyle H. Seymour, president and CEO, S&C Electric; Kyle Birkerts, CEO, Clean Energy Trust; and Eduardo Balbis, managing director for utilities, Accenture. The panel discussed topics such as wind and solar power, storage and energy efficiency.

The second panel titled: *The Consumer of the Future: Empowering Communities* was moderated by Dave Kolata, executive director, Citizens Utility Board. Panelists included: Robert Kelter, senior attorney, Environmental Law and Policy Center; Marty Cohen, principal, Martin Roth Cohen & Associates; Susan L. Satter, public utilities policy counsel, Office of the Illinois Attorney General and Phillip R. O'Connor, president, of PROactive Strategies. This panel discussed the potential benefits and concerns of the future grid as it relates to customer satisfaction, convenience, cost and accessibility.

The final panel titled: *Preparing for the Future: Challenges and Opportunities of Modernizing the Grid* was moderated by ICC Commissioner John R. Rosales. Panelists included: Jeffrey Taft, chief architect for Electric Grid Transformation, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory; Lynne Kiesling, visiting associate professor of economics at Purdue University; Susan Tierney, senior advisor, Analysis Group and former assistant secretary for policy, U.S. Department of Energy; and Tim Yardley, associate director at the Technology Information Trust Institute. The panel discussed the regulatory and economic transitions that will be necessary as the grid becomes more interconnected, decentralized and customer-centered focusing on automation, data analytics, and cyber security.

"By convening discussions like this, and by keeping an open dialogue throughout the NextGrid study, we will lay the foundation for real progress," said Sheahan. "We are in the process of finalizing participation in NextGrid at all levels. We want to have a broad and diverse group to offer input, and highly encourage contributions from all stakeholders in the energy community. We are working to ensure that the NextGrid working groups and advisory committees are manageable in size to be as productive as possible. All individuals and organizations will be presented with the opportunity to track the findings of our working groups and to submit comments and suggestions."

Video of the Launch Event and copies of the speaker presentations may be found at the [NextGrid](#) website. Follow us on Instagram at [nextgrid_illinois](#) and twitter [@ICC_NextGrid](#).

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About the Illinois Commerce Commission

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is a quasi-judicial body made up of five Commissioners. Through its Public Utility Program, the Commission oversees the provision of adequate, reliable, efficient and safe utility services at the least possible cost to Illinois citizens served by electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water and sewer public utility companies. Through its Transportation Regulatory Program, the Commission oversees public safety and consumer protection programs with regard to intrastate commercial motor carriers of general freight, household goods movers, relocation towers, safety towers, personal property warehouses and repossession agencies. The Commission's Rail Safety Program also inspects and regulates the general safety of railroad tracks, facilities and equipment in the state.

To learn more about the Commission, its offices and bureaus, [click here](#). If you are a consumer who needs help resolving a utility dispute call 800-524-0795 or file an online complaint [here](#). For a complaint related to transportation, call 217-782-6448.

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