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Rockland Water Resources Management Task Force Chairwoman: United Water New York Needs To Act Collaboratively

Cornell says company can't opt out because it doesn't like report's findings

New City, NY (Aug. 12, 2015) - United Water New York needs to resume an active role with the Rockland Task Force on Water Resources Management for the good of local ratepayers who contend with some of the highest water bills in the nation, Task Force Chairwoman Harriet Cornell said.

Cornell is asking state Public Service Commission Chairwoman Audrey Zibelman to make United Water's obligations clear after the company abruptly quit the Task Force following the release of a report critical of some of its operations.

The company has also lambasted the report's author, Amy Vickers, a nationally renowned water conservation and efficiency expert, engineer and author based in Amherst, Mass., who conducted the study for the Task Force.

"It is obvious that the independent study analyzing United Water's data has touched a nerve and caused consternation at United Water," Cornell said. "Its reaction was to attack the expertise of the analyst - the very person UW tried to hire; its second reaction is to walk away from the Task Force. The job isn't done, and they can't walk away from participating in a government-community Task Force.

"There's nothing in either the PSC Notice of Aug. 6, 2015 or the Order of Nov. 17, 2014 that tells them 'you're free,'" Cornell said. "The PSC recognized that United Water has a credibility problem and ordered them to be a partner and stakeholder with the Task Force. The people of Rockland want transparency; they want assurances that studies are truly independent and actions are based on objective analysis. That won't happen if United Water goes it alone, and says, 'Trust me.'"

Vickers' key findings on the status of the local water supply determined that repairing a leaky system and boosting customer conservation could add millions of gallons to the inventory.

Cornell, who is a Rockland County Legislator, stressed that the report, *Water Losses and Customer Water Use in the United Water New York System*, offers "a data-driven independent review" that will serve as the basis of a second study that will provide specifics on how to capture "lost" water and conservation strategies.

The study was undertaken in accordance with the Public Service Commission's November 2014 order instructing UWNY to work with the Task Force to identify ways to reduce water demand by 2 million gallons per day, and to increase the supply by 2-million-to-3-million gallons per day.

Cornell said UWNY has been working with the Task Force on a number of projects and that the participation needs to resume.

She points out that in a May 15 letter sent to the PSC requesting an extension of time for United Water to file obligatory reports, the General Manager of United Water, Christopher J. Graziano, wrote: "UW has worked closely and collaboratively with the Rockland Task Force on multiple issues related to conservation, water supply and sustainable water policy. The Task Force, under the leadership of Legislator Harriet Cornell, has fostered a productive and respectful dialogue among stakeholders, and the United Water Team is grateful for the opportunity to be active participants."

Graziano also wrote that "a significant manifestation of the collaboration that has taken place between the Task Force and United Water has been the retention of Vickers and Associates, Inc."

Cornell informed David Stanton, president of UWNY's Regulated Business Division, in a May 19 letter that the company had been providing water usage data incrementally, requiring repeated requests by Vickers for outstanding necessary information as she sought to complete the study.

Vickers also identified and submitted requests to UWNY staff to clarify apparent data discrepancies to give the company an opportunity to address them prior to completion of the final report.

"The goal is to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings or duplication of effort at a later stage when these issues would resurface and require further scrutiny," Cornell wrote.

She pointed out to Zibelman that, "Ms. Vickers' reputation is impeccable, so much so that David Stanton, on behalf of United Water, sought to hire Ms. Vickers as a company consultant."

Cornell also stated to Zibelman that UWNY "may not lament the limitations it has as a private entity in implementing a successful conservation plan, and with the next breath unceremoniously opt out of a partnership forged by the Public Service Commission that was intended to help overcome these cited limitations."

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