

Q&A with MARY J. HEALEY

# Looking out for the little guy

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

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Monday, May 29, 2006

## Mary J. Healey

**Title:** Consumer Counsel

**Agency:** State Office of Consumer Counsel

**Salary:** \$100,000

**Age:** 55

**Education:** Mount Holyoke College, 1973; Boston College Law School, 1976

**Experience:** Senior staff attorney, Insilco Corp., Meriden, 1976-89; general counsel, Yankee Energy System Inc., 1989-2000; Consumer Counsel, 2001-present

**Family:** Husband, Richard, attorney; 3 children

NEW BRITAIN — Walking into a dark room that lit up the minute she stepped in, Mary J. Healey, the state consumer counsel, pointed out the photocopying machine.

The copier, in the stationery room, was on sleep mode and most rooms in her office building, at 10 Franklin Square, are outfitted with motion sensors to save electricity, she said.

“Every little bit counts,” Healey said. “If we all made simple changes, it would make a huge difference.”

Healey should know - she represents consumers in utility cases before the state Department of Public Utility Control and appreciates the challenges before the state with its rising cost of energy.

### **Q What role does your office play in representing consumer’s interests?**

**A** Our office has the legislative mandate to represent state consumers. We will appear in all areas where the state’s regulated utilities and ratepayer’s interests appear. In contested cases, we are automatically a party to the case.

**Q Doesn’t the attorney general represent consumers in these cases as well? Is there an overlap between your office and his?**

**A** The attorney general is not the statutory advocate for consumers. .. Ours is an advocacy job, and we view ourselves as an honest broker. We don’t have any monetary interests in the decisions, we have no shareholders we are beholden to, we don’t have an election to win and we don’t need to be popular. We believe we can make decisions in the best interest of ratepayers.

We are an independent agency and technically, we don’t come under the executive (branch) or the legislature.

We welcome any attention on ratepayer issues, and the involvement of the attorney general definitely draws attention to these issues. We don’t have a public relations department, so any publicity we get is good and welcome. Also, the attorney general’s office generally represents agencies and not people.

### **Q Can you give some examples of how you represent Connecticut consumers?**

**A** We are active in providing testimony at the legislature and we analyze rate increases from the ratepayer’s perspective. We don’t have tremendous clout, but it is important for us to be a voice at the table.

**Q Can you help lower the price of energy in any way?**

**A** I don't know if anybody can control commodity prices, or the weather or global demand, but certainly we can weigh in on some of the rules set in place that could affect the price of energy in Connecticut. For instance, we pointed out that having LICAP (the Locational Installed Capacity pricing program for electricity) would cost tremendous hardship, and we have supported the new plan to have an auction to get the best prices for electricity for consumers.

Prices rise and fall, but you still need to have our voice in the room because it is the voice of the consumer who is paying the bill.

**Q Can you change anything?**

**A** Our bread and butter successes are in the hearing room at the DPUC, where we have prevented the utilities from raising prices beyond a point.

Only people who work in this area understand that we don't have the power supply for 2007 lined up, so we are going to see another round of increases. I expect United Illuminating customers

will see about a 35 percent increase and CL&P customers will see another 15 to 20 percent.

**Q Does most of your time get devoted to energy issues?**

**A** With the price increases, our focus has certainly been on energy issues, but we do weigh in on other ratepayer issues like water, natural gas, some aspects of cable television and public access.

We are up against the major utilities and it really is like being David against Goliath.

**Q What is the greatest challenge your agency faces?**

**A** Shortage of people. We have barely 10 people, down from 19. I could use getting back up to that level, because I have nobody to help educate the public in energy awareness programs.

**Q Don't the utilities take care of that?**

**A** The utilities use their dollars to target some specific programs. I see a need for the general public to be aware of how to conserve energy.