

Shaban's Call for Leadership Is a Little Late



(Response to Op-Ed by John Shaban, Aug. 13, 2020, *Leadership in a Storm.*)

I was glad to see John Shaban, our former state representative for District 135 (Easton, Redding, Weston) express his concern about leadership and accountability in the wake of our recent power outages, now that he is a private citizen. The only problem is that he's complaining about an epic failure by our power companies in a weak system he helped create.

If only Shaban had cared so much about accountability and consumer protection during his tenure in office when he could have fought for legislation to strengthen PURA, our public utilities regulatory authority. But he did not.

He could have introduced cutting-edge legislation to help protect Connecticut utility customers from the Isaias blackout and from surprise rate hikes like we saw last month. But he did not.

At the very least, he should have fought hard for 2012 proposed legislation following the epic devastation of Hurricane Irene, that would have protected utility customers, and held the utility monopolies accountable. But he did not, hoping no one would hold him

accountable.

In fact, the only record Shaban has from his time in office is of protecting power companies like UI and Eversource from more stringent state regulation. This is why they failed us so miserably last week.

The 2012 measure Shaban elected not to fight for would have limited the amount of executive compensation that could be funded by ratepayer dollars. According to published reports, Eversource's five highest-paid employees earned a combined total of just over \$40 million in 2019. Eversource CEO Jim Judge earned more than \$19.8 million last year. Additionally, under the 2012 bill, many customers would have been reimbursed for spoiled food and prescriptions due to an extended power outage and would also have also been eligible for rate-relief due to a long blackout.

Connecticut deserves accountable, competent, public utilities they can trust to deliver power to the public. I plan to co-sponsor legislation even broader than the failed 2012 bill, a Utility Bill of Rights for Consumers to hold public utilities including Eversource and United Illuminating accountable for developing a more secure energy distribution grid, better communications plans, outage-related refunds, limited executive compensation, and burying power lines of communities most impacted: The Take Back Our Grid Act.

As we head into what is forecast to be the most active hurricane season ever, ratepayers are demanding we step up now and build a more accountable, resilient power grid. And as we head into election season, I would hope for an honest debate on the issues that matter most to Connecticut. In this regard, Shaban's disingenuous letter about the storm is as concerning as the hurricane forecast. It's Hurricane and Accountability Season. It's too late to promise ratepayers what you plan to do, when you already had the chance to act. That is why I am determined to act now in the upcoming September Special Session of the General Assembly with the 'Take Back Our Grid Act' and do my job. Shaban had his chance. Hindsight is 2020.