

Hacia las Raíces de los Rate Hikes: a Thrice Told Tale
by *María Antonietta Berriozábal* and *Marisol Cortez*

On February 18th, 2010, San Antonio City Council voted unanimously to approve a request by CPS to raise electricity rates by 7.5% and gas rates by 8.5%. This was the third time in the past 3 years that CPS and Council have raised rates, and it won't be the last. Rather, this rate increase is part of a ten year plan to raise rates every other year for a total increase of approximately 40%. In its pitch to Council over a series of three work sessions and one public hearing, CPS cited the need for more money in order to fund "capital improvements," namely finishing the Spruce II coal plant on the city's Southeast side and extending power transmission to new residential, military, and industrial development, primarily on the city's Northside. According to CPS, the rate hikes are necessary in order to maintain the operation of existing infrastructure and by extension the credit worthiness of CPS as a public utility. If council did not approve the rate hikes, CPS warned, existing infrastructure would deteriorate, jeopardizing CPS's future ability to secure low-interest loans and ultimately to maintain low rates. In a memorable turn of phrase, District 7 Councilman Justin Rodriguez compared the rate hikes decision to a root canal. *Nobody wants a root canal*, he said. *But sometimes they're necessary*.

What's ironic about this choice of metaphors is that not once in either the council discussions or the broader public discourse leading up to the rate hike vote did anyone pose incisive questions about the *root causes* of CPS's root canal request. In other words, and to push Rodriguez's metaphor further, when faced with CPS's argument that rate hikes, like root canals, are lamentable necessities, no one thought to ask: why is the tooth rotten to begin with? What happened to put us in a position where a root canal becomes necessary? Is there something in our diets or environments that weakens teeth? Are we eating too much sugar, or not brushing and flossing enough? Do we lack resources or knowledge to get regular cleanings?

Running with Rodriguez's metaphor leads to questions that begin to seem almost silly--and yet doing so also helps us shift attention from the immediacy of the vote to the broader set of historical and structural conditions that have made the city's 10-year rate hike plan seem a good-for-us-in-the-long-term if immediately undesirable "necessity". What we want to do in this piece is to subject the rate hike vote of February 18th to exactly this kind of radical analysis, in keeping with the original sense of radical as meaning *from the roots*. To do so, we (*María Antonietta Berriozábal* and *Marisol Cortez*) have collaborated as co-escriitoras to tell one story--the story of the rate hikes vote--three times, moving deeper in our analysis as we do so, *hacia las raíces*. Starting with a detailed record of the proceedings during the February 18th City Council meeting, we turn then to a critical examination of the Council vote in the context of both historical patterns of growth-at-any-cost economic development within San Antonio and the environmental injustices resulting from the dirty energy infrastructure necessary for supporting this kind of unsustainable development. Following this, we then tell what *María* calls the "real story" of the rate hikes vote: the community of Latina activists, artists, workers, scholars, and students whose powerful testimony against the rate hikes at the council meeting spoke that which is un-said and un-accounted for within official city planning and policy.

The Official Story (Constructed from notes taken by *María Berriozábal*, with additions by other speakers in attendance)

Citizens' testimony began shortly after 9:00 a.m. It continued for about four hours. Groups who spoke FOR the rate increase included:

North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce (Cindy Jorgensen)
Howard Rogers, San Antonio Manufacturer's Association
Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce (Former Councilman Richard Perez, Carri Wells and Luis De La Garza)
South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce (Douglas Carter and Pete Reyna)
Downtown Alliance (Ben Brewer)
San Antonio Development Foundation (Mario Hernandez)
Alamo City Black Chamber of Commerce (Valerie Toler)
Hispanic Chamber Chamber of Commerce (Ramiro Cavazos)
Another two or three individuals
Generally, reasons these entities favored an increase were:

There is a new day of transparency and good management at CPS with changes that have been made to management. Voting "yes" is a vote of confidence in this new CPS.

If economic development is going to continue in San Antonio, CPS needs this money for infrastructure and replacement of the old.

CPS has consistently provided lower rates than most other cities.

CPS has a history of being run very efficiently.

Money is needed for capital improvements/growth.

CPS has excellent workers.

Energy is needed to attract new industries.

Funds are needed for infrastructure, as some is old and needs replacement.

Most who spoke, however, were AGAINST, including:

Esperanza Peace and Justice Center (Amanda Haas, Marisa Gonzalez, Monica Velasquez, Rosalynn Warren, Brenda Davis, Carlos Salazar)

Southwest Workers' Union (Diana Lopez, Dr. Marisol Cortez)

People's Power Coalition (Genevieve Rodriguez)

Homeowners Taxpayers League (Bob Martin)

Fuerza Unida (Petra Mata, Juanita Reyna, Elpidia Lopez, Viola Casares)

Mujer Artes Cooperativa (Veronica Castillo, Imelda Arizmendi, Inez Valdez)

Seed Coalition (Karen Hadden from Austin, Texas)

Public Citizen (Tom "Smitty" Smith from Austin, Texas)

Alamo Group of Sierra Club (Loretta Coppenolle)

Betty Eckert

Energia Mia (Cynthia Wheeler)

Alice Canestraro-Garcia

Orlando Gutierrez

Former Councilwoman María A. Berriozábal

Maríana Ornelas' testimony was read by the City Clerk

Southwest Workers' Union and the People's Power Coalition created two videos of citizens in

various sites in the city expressing discontent with the increases. Among those interviewed were members of Mujeres Activas en Letras Y Cambios (Drs. Antonia Castaneda, Norma Cantu, and Rita Urqujo-Ruiz), local artist Mary Agnes Rodriguez, *La Voz* editor Gloria Ramirez and UTSA student Rachel Melendez.

There were several other individuals who spoke representing themselves both in the videos and at the City Council meeting.

Reasons given for opposition were as follows:

Neither CPS nor City Council presented a line item budget for the CPS increase. We did not know exactly what Council was voting on.

CPS has had major problems with transparency and management. How can we trust them? In spite of the \$4 billion error CPS made on the nuclear expansion cost, no outside entity has investigated CPS. They investigated themselves. The top board member and a couple of managers resigned but the closed culture of CPS and its mistakes have not been properly scrutinized.

Many of those opposed cited that absent any line item budget detailing how the \$380 million would be spent, CPS could sneak in money for the two nuclear reactors that Council has not voted for.

The recent lawsuit settled between NRG and CPS, which they and the Council celebrated, does not limit liability for CPS.

There was no effort to create a tiered rate structure where customers would be given incentives for conservation/less usage.

Some spoke of the "moral liability" that Council is risking with continued openness to the new nuclear plants that create waste that would be present for thousands of years.

Many spoke on behalf of low-income people who are already having a hard time paying their gas and electricity bills.

There are still questions of how the last CPS rate increase was used. A huge part of a proposed energy program was scrapped and CPS still has to explain where \$93,000,000 went. This could occur again, particularly with no line item details on this increase.

People took exception to the fact that such an important vote is conducted on a weekday morning meeting when most people cannot attend. They indicated such meetings should be held in the evening when more people can attend. Transparency of City Council was an issue.

Instead of providing low income, handicapped, elderly, and other customers facing hardships with utilities assistance, it would be a lot better if CPS promoted/prioritized conservation and efficiency and explored tiered options to encourage conservation so that not only these groups but other customers could benefit.

In these new bonds that will be expended there is no mention of investments in sustainable/renewable energy.

COPS and Metro Alliance spoke in favor of help for low-income people, but they remained neutral.

After hearing all testimony for and against, Mayor and Council responded to both CPS's presentation and citizen testimony.

Councilman Reed Williams had the strongest words in favor of the rate hikes, stating that CPS is a good steward and that Council is serious about its oversight of CPS. In answer to critical questions about the absence of a line item budget, he raised an "11 page document" which he said contained the information. He expressed his support for the rate increase and moved its

passage.

Councilmen Cortez and Medina focused on help for senior citizens indicating that the Enhancement to Affordability Programs would help the low income and elderly. Both expressed support for the REAP PROGRAM and the Enhancements to Affordability Discount Program. Councilwoman Ramos made a friendly amendment to the main motion, which read, "There shall be no expenditures from this rate increase for any future development cost of nuclear energy." She mentioned that she initially had strong reservations and would still have them, had NINA not committed \$10M to the REAP program as a result of the nuclear settlement, decided just a day before.

Councilwoman Taylor responded to Amanda Hass's testimony, in which she encouraged council members to embody the value of courage in being willing to dissent from a majority vote on the rate hike issue. In response, Taylor said that voting no would be easy for her, and that it took more courage to vote yes—that a “no” vote responded to the “short term political impacts” of the ratehikes while a “yes” vote was hard but necessary for the city's longterm interests. She also directed several follow up questions and comments at CPS Interim General Manager Jelynn Leblanc-Burley, including:

where did the \$93M mentioned by Karen Hadden in her testimony as getting diverted away from efficiency and toward STP end up? Leblanc-Burley responded that because CPS had not gotten the full amount of an earlier rate increase, it had had to scrap efficiency plans.

who comprises the REAP board? Taylor commented that she hadn't even known there was one, and when Leblanc-Burley responded that it consisted of the Mayor, the CEO of CPS and another business person, Taylor suggested that CPS may want to consider expanding its membership. what happened to an earlier program where CPS employees did simple weatherization measures? Leblanc-Burley responded that that program was shelved in favor of the current program of doing deeper, more extensive weatherization.

CPS should consider expanding outreach efforts by partnering with grassroots groups and churches.

what are the enrollment requirements for the budget repayment plan mentioned in the CPS slide on their community assistance program? Response: no requirements, you just call to set up a timeline.

CPS should expand eligibility requirements for REAP and energy discounts (upping the requirements from 125% of FPL to 150 or even 200%). Here Taylor agreed with a suggestion also made by Jennifer Ramos.

CPS needs to figure out how to assist people whose homes are so deteriorated that although they meet income eligibility requirements are ineligible for weatherization programs

The rest of the Council members stated their support for the increase and then asked some questions of CPS staff. Many asked Ms. Leblanc-Burley to confirm CPS's "commitment" to low income communities via assistance programs, and indicated that their support for the rate hike request was contingent on their faith in this commitment. However, there was no debate among Council members on any of the points raised in Council's response to Leblanc-Burley and speaker testimony.

After their commentary, the Council voted unanimously for the 7.5% increase in electric base rate and 8.5% increase in gas base rate. All the Council members thanked CPS staff profusely for their work. None had even a bit of hesitancy that they would vote "yes," although there was a moment of minor scandal when the votes appeared onscreen, revealing that Councilman

Medina had voted "no." Medina seemed embarrassed and apologized to the Mayor, claiming it had been a mistake. Mayor Castro called for a re-vote, and the second tally was unanimously in support of the rate increases.

Following the vote, Mayor Castro made the following statements:

CPS shook the public's confidence because of their withholding of information about the real cost of the STP expansion.

CPS has historically operated in a culture of secrecy as if it were not a public entity. An example of this culture is the fact that CPS staff would not let the Council release the line item budget to which Councilman Williams had referred in this very meeting. (We prepared a Freedom of Information Request for this document. At this writing we have not received the information. CPS has not allowed its release. The city has requested an opinion from the State Attorney General on the matter.)

He took exception to there not being Citizens to be Heard at CPS Board Meetings, although he did admit that he is a member of that board.

He did allow that some changes are beginning to occur with the interim manager, Jelynne Leblanc-Burley.

He agreed with Councilman Medina that CPS and the city need to go to places where people gather to inform and educate them about programs available at CPS for low-income folks and seniors.

He indicated the need for a tiered rate structure.

He acknowledged that only recently has sustainability been prioritized within the culture of CPS as an organization. An example of this is that it is often the first thing to be eliminated if there are budget shortfalls. However, that's a policy choice, he said, and CPS could choose differently. CPS has purchased wind and solar power, but it could do more in terms of making more systemic, overall prioritizing of sustainability commitments.

At the same time, he took exception to some people pushing solely for renewables like solar, geothermal, etc. He said if this were the only thing done, it would cost even more to customers. He said CPS rarely comes to Council for rate increases and they deliver the lowest rates possible.

He stated, "There is a demonstrated necessity for an increase," and that he supported the increase.

In closing, Castro stated that CPS had given its commitment to affordability programs and against using rate hike revenues toward future expansion of STP, and he mentioned that CPS would be scrutinized on these benchmarks in evaluating future requests for rate increases. CPS and Council, he said, would be measured in terms of how they handled issues like the implementation of a tiered rate structure and the development of sustainable energy, among others.

The Deeper Story

After sitting through the council meeting, what I (Marisol) found most striking was the way a majority of council members representing poorer districts, and who on this basis asked very critical questions of Leblanc-Burley, nonetheless voted yes. The nature of the reservations they expressed suggested that they could have easily voted no. And yet they didn't: why not? As an

activist and organizer, it would be easy to individualize the behavior of these council members--to call them cowards or sell outs, políticos vendidos who are unaccountable to the people. But as a scholar I always feel compelled to move beyond thinking about power as people or individual agents, and to direct my attention instead to how *systems* function to maintain particular patterns of social inequality and environmental destruction, despite the intentions of individuals. When we can separate individuals from systems, we're in a better position to organize for radical change, for *alternatives* and not just alterations to the present system. At the same time, we must never completely separate individuals and systems, because all of us both internalize/recreate systems and at the same time maintain agency or personal responsibility--in fact, the irreducible gap or difference between systems and individuals is what permits any possibility of resistance to oppression. This is a long way of saying that the story here is not the actions of mayors or council members as much as it is the larger historical and social forces that impel those who occupy mayoral or council seats to act in particular ways that uphold particular interests.

As a grad student studying the cultural politics of waste, one of the ideas that I found most insightful and useful for thinking about the intersections of polluting industrial practices and exclusionary political processes was the notion of path dependency. I came across this idea while researching the historical development of wastewater infrastructure in the United States, in order to understand the environmental injustices produced by this infrastructure (specifically the relocation of treated sewage sludge to communities themselves considered disposable). In a book called *The Sanitary City*, environmental historian Martin Melosi applies the economic theory of path dependency to the formation of municipal services within urban areas in the United States. Specifically, he argues that many of the current environmental problems related to systems of garbage collection, water provision, and sewage disposal result from initial choices which were made arbitrarily, yet which effectively constrain future decisions, locking people into maintaining existing systems by foreclosing the very thinkability of possible alternatives. An often heard example of path dependency is the "qwerty" arrangement of letters on typewriters and now computers. Though perhaps not the most logical or ergonomic arrangement, an initial choice has nonetheless locked us into an established way of doing things.

I thought of the idea of path dependency as I watched these council members who could easily have voted no but who did not--indeed, who felt that they *could* not, insofar as the choice between "no" and "yes" appeared to them as a decision between short term concerns with immediate economic impact and long term concerns with the very viability of CPS as a municipal utility, as measured solely by its ability to provide low cost power to residents. They felt they *had* to vote for the increase or CPS could not function, that there was no alternative to voting yes: they were locked into maintaining the existing system.

Which leads to the question: what *is* this system that perpetuates itself? What is the underlying disease or unifying condition that then gets expressed as interlocking symptoms: reliance on dirty coal power and investment in dangerous nuclear energy, disinvestment in inner cities so that despite low rates the poorest people still lose the most energy and consequently foot the highest bills, a series of unending rate hikes whose impact hurts the same poor families worst, city leaders that negotiate in secret with developers and contractors, sidestepping public involvement in decisionmaking over environmental quality and economic sustainability through court settlements?

We (María and Marisol) posit that, first and foremost, the root of all these symptoms is a colonialist model of development, in which a growth-at-any-cost imperative results in unequal patterns of community investment. Rate hikes seem inevitable to council because the assumption is that the goal is ever increasing growth, necessitating a perpetual series of crises, a perpetual requirement for more and more money. Yet these benefits largely escape many who pay for them. When one looks at the percentage of earnings that a family pays for housing, food, utilities and other basic needs, working class Latinos/as, African American and other low-income families carry a disproportionate share of growth expenditures. For those living in older neighborhoods it is difficult to determine how the growth improves their lives. Why are inner city schools dying while suburban school districts are busting at the seams? Who was helped by an Alamodome for a football team that did not exist? Does the tourism industry that perpetuates unjust labor policies--for housekeepers as an example--improve the lives of those families? Will the coming of the new PGA complex that has stretched public services and created a need for more infrastructure provide a better life for the city's low income and working class people?

Yet the economic model of development seen in these destructive growth patterns is equally an environmental model. This is how the unjust pattern of inner city *disinvestment* represented by the CPS rate increases intersects with the grave environmental injustices produced by the city's *investment* in nuclear and coal powered energy. Because not only does perpetual growth northward threaten the city's sole water source, it also depends on energy sources that are fundamentally polluting and unsustainable. CPS needs more money for two reasons: because it needs to extend operations to new development, and because it needs to finish a coal plant. These two goals are not unrelated. As the city grows, energy demand grows, and hence the apparent need for new supply to maintain what planners and economists term "baseload" capacity. Coal is the cheapest way to supply this capacity, with nuclear seen as its carbon free alternative. But of course there are all sorts of health and environmental impacts associated with the lifecycles of coal and nuclear energy, and thus we see again an unequal distribution of risks and benefits. The benefits of new development (powered by new coal and nuclear plants) head northward, while the poor communities of color in the South, East, and Westside pay--both because their older houses are less energy efficient and their energy bills higher relative to their income, but also because of the simple reason that these new coal plants are closer to their neighborhoods and communities.

Viewed in this broader context, the rate hike vote is simply one symptom of what is at its root a long history of unplanned growth and all the environmental, economic, and procedural injustices it produces--from the construction of the medical center and UTSA far northwest of the city's core to more recent controversies over Applewhite, the Alamodome, Fiesta Texas, La Cantera, and the PGA Village. Viewed within this broader historical context, the rate hike vote has to be examined in connection with the court settlement of the city's stake in the nuclear project, which took place just one day prior. Why do these important events need to be examined in tandem? Because the settlement included \$10M toward affordability programs, which was then used to persuade council members representing poor districts to support the rate hikes, via the logic of the offset that makes tree planting seem like a good solution to the gas guzzling and coal burning. The settlement also made it easy for council, CPS, and the economic interests standing beyond them--the developers, powerful bankers, big employers, certain construction and

engineering firms, mainstream English media outlets, and real estate industry entities that make up what María calls the 17 white men who run the city--to use the money as a convenient wedge, dividing community groups into categories of good activists and bad, depending on how much a group pushes the envelope to address the real issues. (Examples of wedges might include additional funding for assistance programs, how “emotional” a person or group is deemed to be or even explicit reference to dynamics of race and class in analyses of public policy.)

The court settlement was critical beyond the local level as well; in combination with the rate hike vote, it took place just before President Obama announced a tripling of federal loan guarantees for nuclear energy. Thus, even as the rate hike vote ostensibly had nothing to do with STP, in combination with the settlement it functioned as a wink to those in the know, indicating that San Antonio and CPS as its public utility are "credit worthy," code for federal loan guarantee eligible—Council's demands for no rate hike money toward STP and CPS staff's contrite assurances notwithstanding. So even as the settlement reduces the stake of San Antonio in STP (from 50 to 7.6%), it also secures San Antonio's place on the federal short list to receive money for new nuclear projects, while at the same time leaving the door open for expanding the city's stake should this prove lucrative or expedient.

These, then, are the delimiting factors that lock individual council members into a system that seems to present no alternative. Given the priorities of the city--investment in coal and nuclear in order to secure baseload infrastructural capacity in order to meet increasing energy demands in order to fuel growth northward--it is no surprise that the rate hikes seem inevitable and necessary. To return to Justin Rodriguez's metaphor, the rate hikes are like root canals: painful in the short term, good for us and necessary in the long run. And to run once more with this metaphor, we might say that rather than attempt to offset the pain by lobbying for more affordability programs and discounts, it is better to ask: why is the tooth decayed in the first place? What kinds of historical forces, economic interests, and structural inequalities create the appearance of rate hikes as a necessity for the long term public good? Why is the long term public good defined as cheap energy, if cheap energy is based on finite, dirty energy sources like coal and nuclear and gas? And, most importantly, how can we create alternative ways of conceptualizing and measuring what is long term, and public, and good?

The Real Story

On the day after council voted unanimously to increase utility rates, a newspaper headline ran a story that announced, “Council OK’s CPS rate hike.” The article stated that an average customer’s monthly bill would increase by \$5.57, and mentioned that “more than 30 community members spoke to the council, with most opposing it.” It continued, stating that the vote was then taken “after four hours of deliberation.” However, that is not the story.

Supporting the rate increases were individuals, mostly men, who are spokespersons for big business in San Antonio – the local chambers of commerce and other major business entities. Still that is not the story.

The real story is that the majority of those who spoke in opposition were Latinas. They were

young and not so young. They were grassroots leaders, businesswomen, mothers, grandmothers, scholars, volunteers, seamstresses, artists, cultural workers and students. It makes perfect sense that these women would speak out on such a critical issue.

San Antonio has a Latina /o population of over 60%. Half of this population is female. Hence, Latinas comprise the largest population proportionally in San Antonio. In recent years it has been well documented that the Latino/a population is growing rapidly in the United States. Texas is one of the states where we are seeing this trend. Given these developments, the lack of economic opportunity and education among Latina/os and communities of color generally are serious issues. Although it is working class people, poor people, and people of color who are disproportionately affected by public decisions such as energy costs, the concerns and arguments articulated by the Latinas who spoke reflect the interests of the entire San Antonio community. How Latina/o families fare in the future is how we all fare.

These Latinas' voices tell a significant story because the work they perform in their daily lives and the concerns they address in the public arena reflect a profound understanding of how the social, political, cultural, environmental and economic systems interlock to shape the realities of our city. The working of global markets becomes visible in their trips to the grocery store. Unjust political processes become evident in the exclusion of their issues from public policy discussions. Their energy bills suffer the skewed rates of usage and unfair taxing structures that accompany unplanned growth. The environmental degradation produced by unplanned growth wreaks havoc on air, water, soil, and the health of people, and these effects impact the poor and people of color disproportionately. Lack of inclusive and timely citizen participation in the initial stages of planning creates public policy that promotes even more inequalities. Lack of transparency in the legislative process makes it difficult if not impossible to hold elected officials accountable. Because they live it, these mujeres know how to connect the dots. Their strong articulation of the connection between these subjects is the real story because it is the voices of women of color that society tries to minimize, stifle, disrespect, dismiss and ignore. Yet, it was precisely these women who spoke on the day of the council vote. They understand that this vote was one of very few public decisions made each year at City Council that reflects the direction of our city, and where the lines of power become clearly visible--not in the bodies of the men and women elected to sit at the dais, but in the historical and social forces that impel *whoever* sits in those seats to align with particular economic interests. The women who spoke may not know who or what those forces are, but they understand that it is a David vs. Goliath confrontation, where Goliath always wins. Where are public monies spent? Who provides input into such actions? Who benefits? Who pays? Who provides the context and performs the analysis of what this all means? Yes, these Latinas understand.

This was not the first time some or all of the women spoke before the City Council. They have been there on concerns over water, zoning, tax incentives, transportation, environmental racism, nuclear energy, green energy, use of public spaces, labor issues, city budget process and allocations, adherence to Open Meetings laws, immigration and human development issues. So their speaking on February 18, 2010 is not new. These mujeres and their sisters who could not attend on this day stand on the shoulders of generations of Mejicanas, Latinas, and Chicanas who created the path of activism on which we walk today. They did it with their work in the fields, in sweltering factories or over sewing machines; they did it in cleaning other people's houses and raising other people's children; they did it by demanding justice in labor strike lines, engaging in

political activism, and operating the barrio's tienditas to help themselves and their neighbors; and they did this as they were raising their own families and creating community, whether in el barrio or within labor camps. Now engaged as an intergenerational cadre of strong voices these women will continue to speak. In private or public venues, in gatherings large or small, in homes or rallying on the streets, they will not be silenced.

We honor the women who like *mujeres* before them use their agency and strong voices on behalf of their families and communities.

Ø **Amanda Haas, Marissa Gonzalez, Monica Velasquez, Rosalynn Warren, Brenda Davis and Carlos Salazar**, staff and/or Buena Gente spoke for the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. Since its inception over so years ago the Esperanza has stood on the cutting edge of issues that impact the community. It has consistently provided a forum and a space for justice and peace workers, activists, working class and poor people, the GLBT community and people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds to come together, to share experiences and organize. Under the long time leadership of Executive Director **Graciela Sanchez** and its board of directors, the Esperanza is a beacon of light where ideas, enlightening critique and honest exchanges among diverse peoples are respected, encouraged and welcomed. Amanda, Monica, Brenda, Rosalynn and Carlos are part of the Esperanza's staff. Marissa is a substitute teacher at Edison High School and recently received her MA in Bi-cultural Studies at UTSA. These individuals represent the diverse community that is behind the Esperanza's effective and transforming work.

Ø **Petra Mata, Viola Casares, Juanita Reyna, and Elpidia Lopez** represented Fuerza Unida. When the Levi Strauss Company closed one of their plants in San Antonio 20 years ago the mostly Mexican and Mexican American women workers' families were left in limbo. The women could have just cowered with the shock of losing their jobs, but instead they started on a courageous journey to help each other survive. The result is Fuerza Unida, an organization by and for struggling communities who sustain and help each other through their own labor. A sewing cooperative and a catering service provide work for the members and services for the community. Petra and Viola have developed keen insights into globalization having experienced its effects themselves. They have been invited to several United Nations conferences as delegates, traveled to 9 different countries and have testified before Congress and have received distinguished recognitions for their work.

Ø **Genevieve Rodriguez** represented the fledgling People's Power Coalition who partnering with the Esperanza Center, Fuerza Unida, the Southwest Workers Union and others aims to provide a vehicle for organizing in a holistic way around issues of social justice, human rights and the environment. They see a need for communities of color and working class people to be represented and be ready to use their own voices when critical public decisions are made. This is an extremely crucial need in our community since all these issues overlap. These groups want to have a continuous connection with each other to assure timely responses to crises that regularly surface, such as the recent PGA development and water policy issues.

Ø **Diana Lopez and Dr. Marisol Cortez** represented the Southwest Workers Union. Diana

has lived all her life in a neighborhood near Kelly Air Force Base and joined her neighbors in the struggle of the toxic contamination of ground water and other toxins when the base closed. As the Environmental Justice Organizer for SWU she has worked with that union, directed by **Genaro Rendon**, on issues of just immigration reform, toxic fuel tanks in San Antonio's east side, economic justice, youth education, promotion of green energy and against the CPS nuclear expansion. In 2009 she received the Brower Youth Award from the Earth Island Institute. Last year she was a youth delegate at the U. N. Conference for Climate Change in Copenhagen. Marisol began her activism with the Esperanza Center on the U. S. invasion of Afghanistan and the PGA village issue. Through this process, she became interested in studying the cultural politics of environmental problems. She returned to school and in 2009 received her PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of California, Davis. At the present time she is an organizer with SWU and plans to accept a faculty position in the fall.

Ø **Veronica Castillo, Imelda Arizmendi** and **Inez Valdez** represented Mujer Artes an organization of Latinas under the tutelage of Veronica Castillo whose family is internationally known for creating Mexican folk art distinct by its use of vibrant natural colors from plants and minerals. This art has been in their family for generations. They are known for the creation of pieces known as El Arbol de La Vida. Veronica and Imelda, a long time participant in the program, share their knowledge with Latinas in the community. Mujer Artes, a program of the Esperanza Center, is a cooperative selling their folk art throughout the country. The women are encouraged to create their own pieces based on their own life experiences. In this manner the women are able not only to develop their creativity but they generate work to support their families. Last year Imelda was a leader in the effort to educate the Spanish speaking community of San Antonio to prepare and access the digital television transition. Inez, a respected elder in her community, is one of the original participants of this program creating her own works reflecting a life long struggle for justice.

Ø Alice Canastrero Garcia and Mariana Ornelas spoke on behalf of Energia Mia, the coalition organized in the summer of 2009 to engage the community in a discussion and respond to the CPS proposal to built two new nuclear units in Bay City, Texas. Mariana is a faculty member of Palo Alto College and a member of the Esperanza's board of directors. Alice was one of the original visual artists hired at the Carver Cultural Center in 1978. She produced bi-lingual programming public access and then for Houston Community College. She taught in the Houston ISD for 20 years.

All the Latina led organizations described here are an active part of Energia Mía.

Ø **Cynthia Wheeler, Loretta VanCeppele, Smitty Smith, and Karen Hadden** also testified. "Smitty" has for decades led Public Citizen, Karen is head of The Seed Coalition, both of Austin, Texas. Cynthia and Orlando are co-convenors of Energia Mia. Orlando Gutierrez and local Energia Mia convenor was also present.

Ø Dr. Antonia Castañeda and Dr. Norma Cantu, co-founders of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambios (MALCS) of San Antonio, along with Dr. Rita Urqujo-Ruiz, and were featured in a video presented at the Council meeting and prepared by Southwest Workers Union and People's Power Coalition. They urged the Council to vote no on the rate increase. Antonia is a well-known historian having taught at universities in California and in Texas. Before her recent retirement, she was a professor of history at St. Mary's

University. Norma is a Professor of English at UTSA and author of the award winning Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera among other works. Antonia and Norma are co-founders of MALCS of San Antonio. Rita is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Trinity University. She is the first Latina in the history of that university to obtain tenure. MALCS of San Antonio is comprised of Latina scholars at local colleges and universities and Latina community activists whose goal is to strengthen the participation of Latinas in the academy while also joining their efforts in community activism.

!Mujeres,hermanas, adelante! Este mundo las necesita.