

DTE Energy holds another public relations stunt in Taylor, Michigan

A reporting team
13 May 2010

On Tuesday, the city of Taylor, a suburban community southwest of Detroit, hosted an event that was billed as an opportunity for customers to meet with DTE case managers and apply for a Home Heating Credit, a form of aid that some households that cannot afford their utility bills may receive.

The Michigan Department of Human Services, The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) and the WARM Training Center co-hosted the affair, at which little real help was on offer. The event was largely a public relations stunt aimed at promoting a caring corporate image for DTE.

Those who attended were asked to sit and listen to a speaker presenting so-called “WARM Training” on how to reduce energy costs by installing low-wattage light bulbs and better insulation.

When a CAUS supporter pointed out that many in need of help from DTE are on fixed incomes and face utility bills of as much as \$500 a month, one of the young presenters glibly responded, “No one should have a \$500 bill. My bill at its highest is \$200 and no one’s should be any higher. People need to be trained in how to use energy.”

In an expression of the contempt that DTE has for the desperate people who attend such events, the company raffled off a “door prize” of a one-time payment of up to \$2,500 to be used towards a utility bill. For the energy giant, which made \$229 million in profits during the first quarter of 2010, whether or not a family would be able to keep the heat and lights for another month was little more than a fun game to be employed as a marketing promotion.

About one hundred people attended this so-called Consumers Forum. CAUS supporters distributed the “Findings of the Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue Fire: Utility Shutoffs and the Social Crisis in

Detroit” to attendees as they exited and spoke with them about the work of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS).

One woman hurrying to her car accepted the brochure and stated her agreement with its demands, but said she could not talk because she was “in shutoff mode.” DTE was about to turn her power off and she had to hurry to try to prevent it. She was clearly distraught.

Tanya, a young mother, explained that her utility service had just been terminated that day. She was on her way home, where she would have to explain this to her young son, who would just be getting back from school. She described the DTE event as “like kicking you when you’re down.”

Richard, an older man with medical needs, was walking away from the event after being denied help yet again from DTE. He explains his situation here.



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