

Western Queens Power for the People Campaign

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News Conference Statement On Settlement of Case Against Con Ed for July 2006 LIC Outage

Hello. My name is Alyssa Bonilla. I am from Sunnyside and I am a member of the Western Queens Power for the People Campaign. We are a group of residents who came together after the devastating July 2006 power outage in order to demand justice. **(1) If it were not for ordinary people raising their voices we would not be here today.**

(2) Western Queens Power for the People Campaign still firmly believes that Con Edison's negligence caused the power outage and that our community's suffering was needless. Today's settlement doesn't change that. The settlement is simply a way to compel the company to make some restitution for their actions given the limits of the law.

(3) The laws that currently exist to seek justice against a privately owned utility company are inadequate. The primary vehicle available to residents to fight back has been a legal process called a "prudence proceeding" which was conducted by the Public Service Commission. Western Queens Power for the People Campaign was one party to this case.

Western Queens Power for the People Campaign has worked hard to hold Con Edison accountable for their failures. Just how much our community lost during the outage we still don't know because to date no public or private agency has bothered to investigate the damages. Residential customers were only paid \$3 beyond the cost of spoiled food. **(4) We feel one of the most significant benefits from this settlement is that part of the settlement funds will be used to pay for a study to quantify the costs of economic and public health damages suffered by our communities.** It is our hope that our politicians and other public servants will use the information from this study to make better laws to protect the public.

The good news is that (5) Con Ed will be prevented from passing on \$46 million in outage related repairs and other costs to its ratepayers. (6) The settlement also includes an apology from Con Edison and \$17 million in stockholder money for refunds to customers, street trees to provide cooling and improve property values, as well as funds for additional greening projects in the affected communities. (7) This is the first time ever funds from the settlement of a prudence case will go specifically to the communities that were affected by a power outage.

Today's settlement has been made possible through the efforts of many people. In particular, we'd like to thank Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, Chair of the Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions for his political leadership, as well as Eleanor Stein, Guy Mazza, Diane Dean and Michael Worden at the Department of Public Service for their dedication to this case. I want to personally thank my neighbors who put in countless volunteer hours to make this happen and especially my husband Anthony Buczko for his patience and support.

And finally I need to say a word to those who would be critical of this settlement. To them we say: Western Queens Power for the People Campaign understands better than anyone that this settlement does not compensate the community for all its losses. But it's not enough because current state law prevents us from holding Con Ed fully accountable. This settlement is a tremendous victory considering what the state law is. Money will go directly into the pockets of residents, many of whom are struggling and it will help green sections of Queens that have some of the lowest rates of open space in the entire city. We hope our elected officials will have the courage to make the necessary laws that will prevent other communities from suffering like Western Queens did. It may be – it just may be that the time of the privately owned utility company has seen its day.

*The **Western Queens Power for the People Campaign** (PFP) was launched in July 2006 during the 10-day Con Ed power outage by people who live and work in the outage-affected communities of Sunnyside, Woodside, Astoria and Long Island City. PFP volunteers have petitioned; held public meetings; organized and participated in community marches; spoken at public hearings; and written letters to the editor. PFP has acted as a community voice in the state investigation of the July 2006 Queens Power Outage, subsequent prudence proceedings and settlement talks, to fight for justice, an economic-and-public-health impact study and restitution for the outage. PFP also spoke at public hearings in opposition to Con Ed's rate increase.*