OPEN MEETING ITEM

ORIGINAL



MEMORANDUM

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Arizona Corporation Commission

DOCKETED

2013 FEB 28 A 11: 56

TO: THE COMMISSION

FEB 2 8 2013

AZ CORP COMMISSION DOCKET CONTROL

FROM:

Utilities Division

DATE:

February 28, 2013

RE:

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF OWEST CORPORATION DBA CENTURYLINK QC FOR APPROVAL TO SET OR INCREASE THE MAXIMUM TARIFFED RATES FOR CERTAIN COMPETITIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS

DOCKETED BY

SERVICES, PURSUANT TO A.A.C. R14-2-1110.

(DOCKET NO. T-01051B-12-0468)

Introduction

On November 16, 2012, Owest Corporation dba CenturyLink QC ("CenturyLink" or "Company") filed an application to set or to increase the maximum tariffed rates for certain competitive telecommunications services, pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110 ("Rule 1110").

In its Application, CenturyLink seeks to set maximum tariff rates for certain services that are competitive, subject to conditions defined in the Settlement Agreement approved by the Commission in Decision No. 73354 issued on August 21, 2012, and to increase the maximum rate for one service. Directory Assistance ("DA"), that is competitive but not subject to conditions. The proposed maximum rate changes are outlined in the attached Exhibit 1.

Staff is recommending approval of CenturyLink's Application with conditions.

Background

On October 13, 2011, CenturyLink filed with the Commission an Application to classify and regulate certain retail local exchange telecommunications as "competitive" pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1108, and to classify and deregulate certain services as non-essential. Decision No. 73354, the Commission approved a Settlement Agreement between CenturyLink, the Arizona Investment Council, the Residential Utility Consumer Office and Staff providing for competitive classification of CenturyLink's services subject to conditions in the case of Residential and Small/Medium Businesses, and that CenturyLink may file to increase maximum rates pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110 subject to the following conditions:

- For a period of three years from the effective date of the approval of the (a) Settlement, CenturyLink shall not be entitled to increase its maximum rates greater than 25 percent over present rates.
- After making its Rule 1110 filing pursuant to Section 2.2.a of the Settlement, for b) three years following the Order approving the Settlement, CenturyLink may increase its actual rates pursuant to Rule 1109, by no more than 10 percent

- annually for Residential services, and by no more than 15 percent annually for Small and Medium Business services.
- (c) Staff will not contest a Rule 1110 request made by CenturyLink that complies with Section 2.2.a, or a Rule 1109 filing to increase rates that comports with Section 2.2.b, but no other party is constrained form opposing the Rule 1110 increase.
- (d) Enterprise or Large Business services are considered to be fully competitive and may be increased without restrictions, except those provided by the Rules and services that are already classified competitive under Rule 1108. They are also not subject to the conditions of Sections 2.2.a or 2.2.b.
- (e) For three years after the effective date of the Order approving the Settlement Agreement, CenturyLink will charge statewide uniform rates for the services subject to the limitations of Sections 2.2.a and 2.2.b. Thereafter, CenturyLink will charge uniform statewide rates until it receives authorization from the Commission to de-average rates.

CenturyLink proposes to increase maximum recurring and non-recurring rates for eighteen residence and business services. CenturyLink does not propose to increase any actual recurring and non-recurring rate that it currently charges its customers for these services at this time

Sixteen (16) of the eighteen (18) services included in CenturyLink's application are subject to conditions in the Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit A to Decision No. 73354 issued August 21, 2012. Section II.2.2.b states:

"For a period of three years from the date an order is entered by the Commission in this docket approving this agreement or otherwise resolving this petition (the "Order Approving Settlement"), CenturyLink shall not be entitled to increase its maximum rates for residential services or for small and medium business services greater than 25% over present rates."

The proposed maximum rate increases sought for CenturyLink's Local and National Directory Assistance Service options are not subject to the Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit A to Decision No. 73354 issued August 21, 2012.

On November 27, 2012, the Residential Utility Consumer Office ("RUCO") filed an application to intervene without requesting a hearing. RUCO has not been granted intervention at this time.

On January 16, 2013, CenturyLink filed a Notice with an Affidavit of Mailing in the Docket certifying that the notice required by Arizona Administrative Code Section R14-2-1110.B.3 was being sent during the month of January, 2013 via standard U S Mail for those customers who receive paper bills, or was being electronically sent for those customers who have elected to receive their bills in electronic format.

To date, seventeen residential customers have filed in opposition to the proposed increase in the basic telephone service rate. Several customers indicated that the increase would be hard on low-income and retired people living on fixed incomes. Another indicated that landline telephone service is a vital service for older persons. One customer in the Safford area indicated that service there has gotten progressively worse over the years. Another customer indicated that Qwest should receive an increase because it has not had a rate increase in 17 years; however low usage services should not be affected.

Staff's Analysis & Conclusions

The pricing and rate change provision of A.A.C. R14-2-1109 and A.A.C. R14-2-1110 apply to changes in either the price levels or maximum rates for services provided by CenturyLink. A.A.C. R14-2-1109 allows CenturyLink to price a competitive telecommunications service at any level at or below the maximum rate stated in the Company's tariff on file with the Commission, provided that the price for the service is not less than the Company's total service long-run incremental (marginal) cost of providing the service. Pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110.B, CenturyLink is required to submit the following information in order to increase the maximum rates for a competitive telecommunications service:

- 1. A statement setting forth the reasons for which a rate increase is required;
- 2. A schedule of current rates and proposed rates and the additional revenues to be derived from the proposed rates;
- 3. An affidavit verifying that appropriate notice of the proposed rate increase has been provided to customers of the service.

A. CenturyLink's Maximum Rate Increase

CenturyLink proposes to increase maximum recurring rates and several non-recurring rates for 18 residence and business services. It is important to note at the outset that the Company is not proposing to change its current actual rate levels at this time. Setting maximum rates, however, will allow CenturyLink to increase its actual rates up to the maximum rate level subject to the conditions contained in the Settlement Agreement.

CenturyLink is asking to set maximum rates for the following services: Basic Flat-Rate
Residential Service, Low Use Residential Service, Residential Service Stations, Obsolete Local
Service – Residential, Flat-Rate Business Service, Zone Charges for both Residential and
Business Service, Returned Payment Charge, Convenience Fee for Credit Card Payments, Late
Payment Charges, Non-Published Listings and Non-Lists for Residential Service, and Directory
Assistance.

On November 30, 2012, Staff issued its First Set of Data Requests. Staff confirmed that 16 of the 18 services included in CenturyLink's application are subject to the Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit A to Decision No. 73354 issued August 21, 2012. CenturyLink provided information in response to Staff Data Requests stating the cumulative revenue impact

of the overall increase for Residential and Small/Medium Business Customers should CenturyLink eventually increase its actual rates up to maximum levels. Staff confirmed that the proposed maximum rate increases corresponding to the 16 services subject to the Settlement Agreement in Decision No. 73354 are less than or equal to 25% over present rates.

B. CenturyLink's Request with Respect to Directory Assistance

CenturyLink is proposing a maximum rate of \$1.99 for DA calls, outside the monthly free call allowance, which equals a 73% increase over the present rate of \$1.15. The proposed maximum rate of \$1.99 will also apply to <u>all</u> DA calls, resulting in the elimination of CenturyLink's Price Cap Tariff No. 2, section 6.2.4,A.2.a, call allowance - "A customer is allowed one directly dialed Directory Assistance call per month at no charge for each central office line or trunk, excluding Public Access Lines ("PALs.")"

The portion of CenturyLink's application dealing with DA will be addressed in a separate Staff report. CenturyLink has agreed to deferment of the DA issue while Staff continues to review this portion of the Company's application. Currently Staff has asked CenturyLink for additional information on this issue and CenturyLink is in the process of assembling the information requested by Staff.

C. Compliance with Constitutional Fair Value Mandate

Article XV, Section 14 of the Arizona Constitution requires that the Commission establish rates by reference to the "fair value" of the utility's property devoted to the public service. However, in a competitive market as here, the Commission has broad discretion in determining the weight to be given fair value rate base in setting rates. Courts have stated that there is no reason to rigidly link the fair value determination to the establishment of rates in a competitive market.

Staff has reviewed the most recent annual report filed by CenturyLink and determined that the intrastate fair value rate base of the Company for year end 2011 to be CONFIDENTIAL. Staff did request from CenturyLink and did consider the impacts of the proposed maximum rate increases in relation to fair value and the operating revenues of the Company. Staff did not accord this analysis the same amount of weight that it would have if CenturyLink still operated in markets that were not competitive.

In a competitive market, the actual rates ultimately charged by CenturyLink will be heavily influenced by the market. As of this time, CenturyLink has proposed no changes to its actual rates charged to customers. In addition, the maximum rates proposed by CenturyLink for all services other than DA, reflect the Settlement Agreement condition of no more than a 25% overall increase for Residential services and Small and Medium Business Services for the next three years. The Settlement Agreement further limits any increases for Residential and Small/Medium Business in each of the first three years to 10%. CenturyLink has not increased its basic local rates for Residential customers since 1995.

As another benchmark of reasonableness, Staff reviewed the proposed maximum rates with the rates charged by other ILECs and CLECs operating in the State of Arizona and found CenturyLink's maximum rates to be comparable. There are local exchange service alternatives available to CenturyLink's end-user customers, should customers find any rate increases to actual rates unacceptable.

Given these considerations, Staff found the proposed maximum rates to be fair and reasonable.

Staff's Recommendations

Staff recommends the following:

- 1. That CenturyLink's application for a maximum rate increase be granted without a hearing.
- 2. That prior to raising actual rates for services affected by this application, CenturyLink provide both the Commission and its customers notice as required under Arizona law, including the Commission's rules.
- 3. That CenturyLink's DA request be bifurcated from this proceeding and be dealt with at a later time.

Steven M. Olea

Director

Utilities Division

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ORIGINATOR: Armando F. Fimbres

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EXHIBIT 1

Exhibit 1
Proposed Maximum Rate Changes

SERVICE*	PRESENT RATE	PROPOSED MAXIMUM RATE
FLAT RATE SERVICE-RESIDENTIAL PRIMARY LINE	\$13.18	\$16.47
FLAT RATE SERVICE – BUSINESS PRIMARY LINE	\$30.40	\$38.00
SERVICE STATION LINE - RESIDENTIAL	\$13.18	\$16.47
4-PARTY SERVICE – RESIDENTIAL	\$10.70	\$13.37
LOW USE OPTION – RESIDENTIAL PRIMARY LINE OR ADDITIONAL LINE	\$8.50	\$10.62
LOW USE OPTION – RESIDENTIAL PER CALL CHARGE	\$0.20	\$0.25
OUTSIDE OF BASE RATE AREA - ZONE 1 CHARGE	\$0.50	\$0.62
OUTSIDE OF BASE R ATE AREAS - ZONE 2 CHARGE	\$1.50	\$1.87
NON-PUBLISHED SERVICE- RESIDENTIAL	\$0.90	\$1.12
NON-LIST SERVICE – RESIDENTIAL	\$0.55	\$0.68
RETURNED PAYMENT CHARGE	\$10.00	\$12.50
CREDIT CARD PAYMENT CONVENIENCE FEE	\$4.00	\$5.00
LATE PAYMENT CHARGE	1.50%	1.88%

^{*}Unless otherwise indicated, the rate applies to both residence and business customers.

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1	BEFORE THE ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION	•	
2	BOB STUMP		
3	Chairman GARY PIERCE		
4	Commissioner BRENDA BURNS		
5	Commissioner BOB BURNS		
6	Commissioner SUSAN BITTER SMITH		
7	Commissioner	:	
8	IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION) DOCKET NO. T-01051B-12-0468		
9	OF QWEST CORPORATION DBA CENTURYLINK QC FOR APPROVAL TO DECISION NO.		
10	SET OR INCREASE THE MAXIMUM ORDER		
11	TARIFFED RATES FOR CERTAIN COMPETITIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS {		
12	SERVICES, PURSUANT TO A.A.C. R14-2- }		
13)		
	On on Mosting		
14 15	Open Meeting March 12 and March 13, 2013 Phoenix, Arizona		
16	BY THE COMMISSION:		
17	FINDINGS OF FACT		
18	I. <u>Introduction</u>		
19	1. On November 16, 2012, Qwest Corporation dba CenturyLink QC ("CenturyLink")		
20	filed an application to set or to increase the maximum tariffed rates for certain competitive		
21	telecommunications services, pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110 ("Rule 1110").	-	
22	2. In its Application, CenturyLink seeks to set maximum tariff rates for certain		
23	services that are competitive subject to conditions defined in the Settlement approved by the		
24	Commission in Decision No. 73354 issued on August 21, 2012, and to increase the maximum rate		
25	for one service, Directory Assistance ("DA"), that is competitive but not subject to conditions.		
26	The proposed maximum rate changes are outlined in the attached Exhibit 1.	-	

This Staff Report addresses all services encompassed in CenturyLink's Application

with the exception of DA. Thus, Staff recommends approval of CenturyLink's Application for all

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services but DA. The Company's proposals with respect to DA are still being reviewed by Staff and will be addressed in a separate Staff Report.

II. Background

- On October 13, 2011, CenturyLink filed with the Commission an Application to classify and regulate certain retail local exchange telecommunications as "competitive" pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1108, and to classify and deregulate certain services as non-essential. In Decision No. 73354, the Commission approved a Settlement Agreement between CenturyLink, the Arizona Investment Council, the Residential Utility Consumer Office and Staff providing for competitive classification of CenturyLink's services subject to conditions in the case of Residential and Small/Medium Businesses, and that CenturyLink may file for increased rates pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110 subject to the following conditions:
 - (a) For a period of three years from the effective date of the approval of the Settlement, CenturyLink shall not be entitled to increase its maximum rates greater than 25 percent over present rates.
 - (b) After making its Rule 1110 filing pursuant to Section 2.2.a of the Settlement, for three years following the Order approving the Settlement, CenturyLink may increase its actual rates pursuant to Rule 1109, by no more than 10 percent annually for Residential services, and by no more than 15 percent annually for Small and Medium Business services.
 - (c) Staff will not contest a Rule 1110 request made by CenturyLink that complies with Section 2.2.a, or a Rule 1109 filing to increase rates that comports with Section 2.2.b, but no other party is constrained form opposing the Rule 1110 increase.
 - (d) Enterprise or Large Business services, are considered to be fully competitive and may be increased without restrictions, except those provided by the Rules and services that are already classified competitive under Rule 1108 are also not subject to the conditions of Sections 2.2(a) or 2.2.b.
 - (e) For three years after the effective date of the Order approving the Settlement Agreement, CenturyLink will charge statewide uniform rates for the services subject to the limitations of Sections 2.2.a and 2.2.b. Thereafter, CenturyLink will charge uniform statewide rates until it receives authorization from the Commission to deaverage rates.
- In its current Application, CenturyLink proposes to increase maximum rates for 18 residence and business services.

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Decision No.

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6. On November 27, 2012, the Residential Utility Consumer Office ("RUCO") filed an application to intervene without requesting a hearing.

- 7. On January 16, 2013, CenturyLink filed a Notice with an Affidavit of Mailing in the Docket certifying that the notice required by Arizona Administrative Code Section R14-2-1110.B.3 was being sent during the month of January, 2013 via standard U S Mail for those customers who receive paper bills, or was being sent electronically for those customers who have elected to receive their bills in electronic format.
- 8. To date seventeen residential customers have filed in opposition to the proposed increase in the basic telephone service rate. Several customers indicated that the increase would be hard on low-income and retired people living on fixed incomes. Another indicated that landline telephone service is a vital service for older persons. One customer in the Safford area indicated that service there has gotten progressively worse over the years. Another customer indicated that Qwest should receive an increase because they have not had a rate increase in 17 years; however low usage services should not be affected.
- 9. On February 21, 2013, a procedural conference was held to determine whether a hearing on CenturyLink's Application was necessary. CenturyLink, Staff and RUCO were the only parties present at the procedural conference. All parties present agreed that a hearing was not necessary.

III. Staff's Analysis & Conclusions

- 10. The pricing and rate change provision of A.A.C. R14-2-1109 and A.A.C. R14-2-1110 apply to changes in either the price levels or maximum rates for services provided by CenturyLink. A.A.C. R14-2-1109 allows CenturyLink to price a competitive telecommunications service at any level at or below the maximum rate stated in the company's tariff on file with the Commission, provided that the price for the service is not less than the company's total service long-run incremental (marginal) cost of providing the service. Pursuant to A.A.C. R14-2-1110.B, CenturyLink is required to submit the following information in order to increase the maximum rates for a competitive telecommunications service:
 - a. A statement setting forth the reasons for which a rate increase is required;

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- b. A schedule of current rates and proposed rates and the additional revenues to be derived from the proposed rates;
- c. An affidavit verifying that appropriate notice of the proposed rate increase has been provided to customers of the service.
- 11. In addition, sixteen (16) of the eighteen (18) services included in CenturyLink's application are subject to conditions in the Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit A to Decision 73354 issued August 21, 2013. Section II.2.2.b states:

"For a period of three years from the date an order is entered by the Commission in this docket approving this agreement or otherwise resolving this petition (the "Order Approving Settlement"), CenturyLink shall not be entitled to increase its maximum rates for residential services or for small and medium business services greater than 25% over present rates."

A. CenturyLink's Maximum Rate Increase Request for Services Other than DA

- 12. CenturyLink proposes to increase maximum recurring rates and several non-recurring rates for 18 residence and business services.
- 13. It is important to note at the outset, that the Company is not proposing to change its current actual rate levels at this time. Setting maximum rates, however, will allow CenturyLink to increase its actual rates up to the maximum rate level subject to the conditions contained in the Settlement Agreement.
- 14. CenturyLink is asking to set maximum rates for the following services: Basic Flat-Rate Residential Service, Low Use Residential Service, Residential Service Stations, Obsolete Local Service Residential, Flat-Rate Business Service, Zone Charges for both Residential and Business Service, Returned Payment Charge, Convenience Fee for Credit Card Payments, Late
- Payment Charges, Non-Published Listings and Non-Lists for Residential Service, and Directory Assistance.
- On November 30, 2012, Staff issued its First Set of Data Requests. Staff confirmed that 16 of the 18 services included in CenturyLink's application are subject to the Settlement Agreement attached as Exhibit A to Decision 73354 issued August 21, 2012. CenturyLink provided information in response to Staff Data Requests stating cumulative revenue impact of the

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overall increase for Residential and Small/Medium Business Customers should CenturyLink eventually increase its actual rates up to maximum levels. Staff confirmed that the proposed maximum rate increases corresponding to the 16 services subject to the Settlement Agreement in Decision No. 73354 are less than or equal to 25% over present rates.

B. CenturyLink's Request with Respect to DA

- 16. CenturyLink is proposing a maximum rate of \$1.99 for DA calls, outside the monthly free call allowance, which equals a 73% increase over the present rate of \$1.15.
- 17. The proposed maximum rate of \$1.99 will also apply to <u>all</u> DA calls, resulting in the elimination of CenturyLink's Price Cap Tariff No. 2, section 6.2.4,A.2.a, call allowance "A customer is allowed one directly dialed Directory Assistance call per month at no charge for each central office line or trunk, excluding Public Access Lines ("PALs.")"
- 18. The portion of CenturyLink's Application dealing with DA will be addressed in a separate Staff report. CenturyLink has agreed to defer the DA issue while Staff continues to review this portion of the Company's Application. Currently Staff has asked the Company for additional information on this issue and CenturyLink is in the process of assembling the information requested by Staff.

C. Compliance with Constitutional Fair Value Mandate

19. Article XV, Section 14 of the Arizona Constitution requires that the Commission establish rates by reference to the "fair value" of the utility's property devoted to the public service. However, in a competitive market as here, the Commission has broad discretion in determining the weight to be given fair value rate base in setting rates. Courts have stated that there is no reason to rigidly link the fair value determination to the establishment of rates in a competitive market.

20. Staff has reviewed the most recent annual report filed by CenturyLink and determined that the intrastate fair value rate base of the Company for year end 2011 to be CONFIDENTIAL. Staff did request from CenturyLink and did consider the impacts of the proposed maximum rate increases in relation to fair value and the operating revenues of the

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Company. Staff did not accord this analysis the same amount of weight that it would have if CenturyLink still operated in markets that were not competitive.

- In a competitive market, the actual rates ultimately charged by CenturyLink will be heavily influenced by the market. As of this time, CenturyLink has proposed no changes to its actual rates charged to customers. In addition, the maximum rates proposed by CenturyLink for all services other than DA, reflect the Settlement Agreement condition of no more than a 25% overall increase for Residential services and Small and Medium Business Services for the next three years. The Settlement Agreement further limits any increases for Residential and Small/Medium Business in each of the first three years to 10%. CenturyLink has not increased its basic local rates for Residential customers since 1995.
- 22. As another benchmark of reasonableness, Staff reviewed the proposed maximum rates with the rates charged by other ILECs and CLECs operating in the State of Arizona and found CenturyLink's maximum rates to be comparable. There are local exchange service alternatives available to CenturyLink's end-user customers, should customers find any rate increases to actual rates unacceptable.
- 23. Given these considerations, Staff found the proposed maximum rates to be fair and reasonable.

Staff's Recommendations IV.

- 24. Staff recommends approval of this filing conditioned upon the following:
 - a. That CenturyLink's application for a maximum rate increase for all services requested in the Application except Directory Assistance be granted. The portion of CenturyLink's Application which proposes a maximum rate increase for Directory Assistance will be addressed at a later date.
 - b. That prior to raising actual rates for services affected by this application, CenturyLink provide both the Commission and its customers notice as required under Arizona law, including the Commission's rules.
 - c. That at least 60 days prior to raising the actual rates for services, CenturyLink shall make a filing with Staff, so that Staff can confirm that the conditions of the Settlement Agreement which impose limits on the amount CenturyLink can increase actual rates on an annual basis for Residential, Small and Medium Business services, are met.

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IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that before CenturyLink makes any changes to its actual rates 1 2 it shall provide both the Commission and customers with notice as provided under Arizona law and Commission rules. 3 4 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that at least 60 days prior to raising the actual rates for 5 services, CenturyLink shall make a filing with Staff, so that Staff can confirm that the conditions 6 of the Settlement Agreement which imposes limits on the amount CenturyLink can increase actual 7 rates on an annual basis for Residential, Small and Medium Business services, are met. 8 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Decision shall be become effective 9 immediately. 10 BY THE ORDER OF THE ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION 11 12 **CHAIRMAN COMMISSIONER** 13 14 15 COMMISSIONER COMMISSIONER COMMISSIONER 16 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I, JODI JERICH, Executive Director of the Arizona Corporation Commission, have 17 hereunto, set my hand and caused the official seal of this Commission to be affixed at the Capitol, in the City of 18 Phoenix, this day of , 2013. 19 20 21 JODI JERICH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 22 23 24 25 26 DISSENT: 27 SMO:AFF:sms/MAS

Exhibit 1

Proposed Maximum Rate Changes

. SERVICE*	PRESENT RATE	PROPOSED MAXIMUM RATE
FLAT RATE SERVICE-RESIDENTIAL PRIMARY LINE	\$13.18	\$16.47
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