

Shareholders approve utility merger

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) - Shareholders have overwhelmingly approved a proposed merger of Kansas' largest electric company with a Missouri firm.

Kansas City, Missouri-based Great Plains Energy Inc. and Topeka-based Westar Energy Inc. announced in a news release Tuesday that more than 90 percent of the shares voted at each company approved the transaction.

The revised deal creating a company with a combined equity value of about \$14 billion still requires regulatory approval.

The Kansas Corporation Commission issued an order Tuesday setting out a schedule next year that includes an evidentiary hearing March 19-27. Its order is due by June 5.

The companies made public the revised transaction this summer after the commission denied their original request after concluding the price was too high and would leave the combined utility financially weaker than separate companies.

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