

# Mayor talks SEC buyout

[http://www.dchieftain.com/news/mayor-talks-sec-buyout/article\\_e095c538-b6ae-11e8-b984-bf2c768c88a5.html](http://www.dchieftain.com/news/mayor-talks-sec-buyout/article_e095c538-b6ae-11e8-b984-bf2c768c88a5.html)

By Scott Turner - El Defensor Chieftain Editor Sep 13, 2018

Socorro Mayor Ravi Bhasker said he hasn't heard a word from the Socorro Electric Cooperative since proposing to buy it out at an SEC Board of Trustees meeting last year.

"I sat in that meeting for an hour-and-a-half listening to how good Tri-State was," Bhasker said. "I gave my speech for five minutes, gave them all of this one, two, three, not a word. They didn't even talk to me when I was there face-to-face."

Bhasker said the SEC has not tried to contact him since.

"They will not work with us," Bhasker said.

That has not stopped the City of Socorro's plans of buying out the Co-op. The Socorro City Council voted to seek RFPs (Request for Proposals) for long term wholesale power supply, scheduling services and project capital financing at its meeting on Aug. 20.

"We have companies willing to finance us," Bhasker said.

Getting the RFPs is the first step in the process. Putting together a package to promote the proposal is another step, Bhasker said.

"At this point, we're going to get the RFPs," Bhasker said. "We're going to step into the shoes of the Co-op. We're not just going to put on the socks, which is just Socorro. We're going to step into the shoes for the whole thing."

Bhasker hopes to get the issue on the agenda at the SEC's annual meeting.

"It will be a fight that we will ultimately be taking to the Socorro Electric Co-op members. It's the membership that will have to vote to sell it," Bhasker said. "We will give them the proposal of what the cost will be."

Bhasker said the City has already developed a municipal utility.

"We have an ordinance for that," Bhasker said. "Now we're going to fit this in. One of the Councilors (Michael Olguin Jr.) is saying 'I want to look at it and I don't want to make the wrong decision.' We've been looking at the Co-op for 10 years. We haven't gotten anywhere. So we're going to look at them for another 20 years while this town shrinks in size? ... Are we just going to sit here? We just can't do that."

Bhasker expressed a belief the City can offer cheaper electric rates to Co-op members than the Co-op itself.

"We will give them the proposal of what the cost will be," Bhasker said. "Tri-State is providing electricity to Gallup as of last year the same electricity, the same electrons, for 3½ cents and they're charging this Co-op 7½ cents. What the heck is going on? They're in a 50-year contract. What I'm trying to say is that there's 3½ cents out there. Not just Tri-State. There's 3½ cents out there. Why is it our noble cause to pay the extra four cents?"

In past interviews with The Chieftain, SEC General Manager Joseph Herrera said the cooperative's rates were not out of line with other co-ops in the state. He also emphasized the SEC had not raised rates in more than seven years.

That may be about to change after the SEC Board of Trustees passed a resolution intending to raise \$6 million in five years with a rate increase totaling \$1.2 million a year.

“We need to sell it to the Co-op members,” Bhasker said. “That means the ones in Datil, the ones in Veguita, the ones in San Antonio, the ones in Socorro. We’re going to put on a campaign to advise them as to what is going on.”

Bhasker concedes the matter could end up in court.

“If I have to, and our lawyer doesn’t want us to, we’ll just send a notice of trespassing to the co-op and tell them to get their poles off our property,” Bhasker said. “They can sell the electricity however they want. We’re going to tell them ‘go put them somewhere else. That’s like the end of the road.’”

Bhasker believes a City run electric utility can provide members with renewable energy and also use the infrastructure as a means to bring broadband Internet to the community.

“The final nail in the coffin is how they turned away TDS (to bring broadband to the community),” Bhasker said. “They just couldn’t work with them. And they tried to get the money out of them. I wouldn’t be as upset, but I know what happened in Lovington. I know what happened in Ruidoso. Why could they get with TDS, and we couldn’t do it? They were willing to put up their own money. They didn’t want anything from the city.”

While the City does not operate an electric utility, Bhasker emphasizes the City operates other utility services.

“The City never owned a gas utility until the ‘50s. ... and the City got into the natural gas business,” Bhasker said. “They didn’t have the expertise in that before. We developed a gas department, like the head of my gas department said, we’re at the low end of pricing gas. We may not be the cheapest, but we will be at the low end of electricity.”

The Chieftain reached out to Herrera about an interview on what the City was proposing. He asked for questions to be submitted in writing. Questions were submitted. Answers from the SEC have not been submitted at press time.