

## Why is SEC board acting as if it has something to hide?

Chieftain editorial – September 20, 2018

[http://www.dchieftain.com/opinion/why-is-sec-board-acting-as-if-it-has-something/article\\_2a5bce34-bc2b-11e8-bc63-93f9e9bcf51b.html](http://www.dchieftain.com/opinion/why-is-sec-board-acting-as-if-it-has-something/article_2a5bce34-bc2b-11e8-bc63-93f9e9bcf51b.html)

Did the Socorro Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees raise rates or fees?

If so, which one? By how much? And why?

Those aren't very hard questions. They are questions we've asked SEC General Manager Joseph Herrera, SEC Communications Director Jimmy Capps and Board President Anne Dorough over the past couple of weeks.

And for good reason.

At the SEC's monthly meeting Aug. 22, the Trustees passed a resolution that will increase rates or fees that will put \$1.2 million in the SEC's coffers each year for the next five years.

We were short staffed that week. *Chieftain* reporter John Larson, who normally covers the Co-op's meetings, was on vacation.

Fortunately, the Co-op's meetings are videotaped.

The conversation on the video was a bit vague. The Trustees did not come out and say this is how much we're raising per member. They didn't openly say "this is why we're doing this."

Only one member, Donald Wolberg, questioned why the Board didn't at least notify members before the vote that there will be a bump in their electric bills.

Dorough emphatically said the Board did not need to notify members. They had the authority to act on the membership's behalf ... and did so.

We agree with Wolberg. Just because the Board had the authority to act without the membership's input doesn't mean it was ethically right to do so.

Dorough, Herrera, Capps and others involved with the Co-op like to call the members "owners."

"This is your Co-op," Dorough said multiple times during the cooperative's annual meeting in April.

But what business does not notify ownership when it is about to raise the prices of the products it produces?

That was a reason why we felt like we needed to seek the answers into the actions of the Board at that meeting.

Just what exactly did the Board do?

Larson requested to see a copy of the resolution, which is something government agencies such as the Socorro County Board of Commissioners and the City of Socorro provide.

Capps told Larson he had to fill out a membership request form to obtain a copy. Publisher Scott Turner filled one out instead. The reason stated on the form was to give you the readers ... aka SEC members ... "the owners" ... an accurate account of what took place.

You have a right to know how much more you'll be paying for your electric service. And you have a right to know why.

You shouldn't have to wait until a month after the fact to find out through a prepared letter that will accompany your bill.

A Facebook post by the Co-op on Sept. 5 did say community meetings would be held. It also stated how much the SEC hoped to raise through the increase, which we've reported. But it was vague on the need other than stating the SEC had declining energy sales. It did not state what kind of increase it would be passing on the membership and how much.

We're still waiting on word on whether the request to see the resolution will be granted. We're still waiting for responses from Herrera or Capps directly about the questions we posed at the top of this editorial.

We're not questioning the need for the increase. The problem is we don't know what that need is.

But the language used during that meeting seemed pretty dour.

The increase, Dorough said, was needed so the Co-op can continue operating.

Socorro City Councilor Mary Ann Chavez-Lopez wondered why the issue wasn't addressed at the annual meeting.

If it is that serious why wasn't it brought up back then when the Co-op was reporting a profit of more than \$1 million in the past year and was announcing thousands of dollars in scholarship money?

Sadly, this is becoming a pattern for an organization that once sued its membership because it didn't want to abide by open meetings laws.

It lost that battle in court.

A few weeks ago, the Socorro City Council passed an RFP seeking suppliers to serve the area the Co-op currently served.

*The Chieftain* sought an interview with Herrera, Capps and Dorough, or another Trustee. We wanted to give the Co-op a chance to tell its side of the story.

We have not taken a position on Mayor Ravi Bhasker's proposal to buy out the Co-op.

Herrera suggested instead that we send him written questions and he would get back to us in a timely manner.

We took him up on that offer and emailed him the questions.

It's been four weeks. We have yet to receive the answers.

We're not saying the Co-op is hiding something.

But its leaders certainly are acting like it.

*Editor's note: Herrera sent an email on Wednesday after The Chieftain had gone to press stating: "Due to the importance of the discussion topic, we at SEC know that it would be best that we communicate directly with The SEC membership when, or if, anything of substance occurs between SEC and the City."*

*He said the Board would take up the issue of the request to see the resolution at its next meeting*