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Bustamante To Lead Electric Co-op For Another Term

By John Severance

SOCORRO – The three new trustees took their seats as the Socorro Electric Cooperative board met for the first time in this year on Tuesday, Jan. 12.

The first order of business for the new trustees -- Luis Aguilar, Prescilla Mauldin and Donald Wolberg – and the rest of the board, was to elect officers.

Aguilar nominated Wolberg and Leo Cordova nominated Paul Bustamante for the presidential spot. By a 7-4 vote, Bustamante remained as president.

Leroy Anaya nominated Dave Wade as vice president, and Wolberg nominated Mauldin for the vice president spot. By a 7-4 vote, Wade was elected vice president.

Aguilar was appointed to the secretary post. Nine trustees voted for Aguilar and there were two empty ballots. Trustee Charlie Wagner made a motion to combine the secretary and treasurer posts, but Bustamante said “maybe we will look into that next year.”

Wagner then nominated Aguilar for treasurer, Manny Marquez nominated Milton Ulibarri, and Mauldin nominated Wolberg.

Ulibarri got the treasurer post with seven votes, Wolberg had three, and Aguilar one.

The trustees moved on to the business portion of the meeting and the approval of the minutes.

Wagner pointed out the word “sexual” was left out of the minutes of the last regular meeting. He was referring to being accused of discriminatory comments aimed at co-op accountant Kathy Torres.

“That word was left out and it should be reflected in the minutes,” Wagner said.

“They are important and that should be included in the minutes,” attorney Dennis Francis said. “There are other changes. You also accused the accountant of falsifying records.”

Wagner said, “This was a teleconference meeting about the Form 990. My complaint was that the Form 990 was not correct and some information was false. The auditor agreed with me and he changed the answers to two or three questions.”

“We need that in the minutes as well,” Francis said.

After some more discussion, Wagner said, “We have a policy 217 that directs the manager to take action when sexual discrimination takes place. The manager did not obey the policy.”

Francis said, “We agreed ‘sexual’ should be in there and the minutes will be corrected.”

After approval of the minutes, trustees asked questions of General Manager Polo Pineda about the co-op expenditure report.

“I was troubled by the number of payroll advances,” Wolberg said. “If we have employees that have problems, we should work with them.”

Pineda said the money is taken out of the employee’s following paycheck.

Wolberg asked Pineda about the Christmas party expense, which totaled around \$10,000.

Wagner added that he would like to see itemized expenditures for the banquet in 2008 and 2009.

“We live in difficult economic times and we really have to re-evaluate what we do and why,” Wolberg said.

Wolberg’s emphasis, though, was all about communication between the trustees and its members.

“We really have to work on this,” he told the board. “In the mail today, I received a package from the National Rural Cooperative. They had some information about being a trustee and a calendar and I got a bumper sticker that said, ‘I love my Electric Co-op.’ I would love to see that on every car in this town.”

Bustamante said, “We need to go forward and we always seem to be going backward. There are a lot of issues we need to take care of.”

In its last meeting of 2008, the board voted to utilize the services of Michael Olguin for its insurance.

Pineda said that since then he has been approached again by Aon and Brown and Brown.

“I am going to tell them to contact us next year,” Pineda said.

Wolberg then brought up the subject of an informational meeting. He said he wants the members to know what

resolutions are coming up before the general meeting in April.

Francis pointed out that there nothing in the co-op bylaws about an informational meeting.

Wolberg said, “[I] don’t care what you call this, but we have to do this. We need to change our image with our members. If we don’t, we will go down this path forever.”

Bustamante said it was something the co-op has to check into, and Pineda added it probably would cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 to hold such a meeting. Wolberg said money could be saved by putting the meeting documents in upcoming bills.

Wolberg then asked Bustamante to clarify the co-op attorney situation.

Bustamante assured Wolberg that the co-op has one attorney, Dennis Francis.

Wolberg pointed out that in a meeting in November, the co-op had hired the services of Joanna Aguilar and Paul Kennedy as well, and there had been nothing in the minutes about the termination of their services.

“There was no contract. There never were three attorneys. There was a transition,” Bustamante said.

Wolberg then said he had concerns about Francis.

“He represents another co-op and I am concerned about a conflict of interest,” Wolberg said.

Francis responded by saying, “I was the attorney for this co-op between 2002 and 2005, and was the attorney for another co-op and there was never a problem.”

Wolberg said, “I just want to protect the co-op.”

After about an hour and half, Pineda asked that the trustees go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter.

The meeting was called back to order after about 20 minutes and it was immediately adjourned.