

[Wolberg: Co-op ought to renew vows](#) by T.S. Last Sat. Feb 6 2010

Donald Wolberg doesn't want to see Socorro Electric Cooperative member-owners "divorce" themselves from their board of trustees.

As one of three District 3 (Socorro) challengers who unseated incumbents in elections held last fall, Wolberg addressed the separation that has occurred between the board and the people it represents when the trustees met for their regular meeting on Jan. 27.

"I kind of view it as a marriage and, like many marriages that last for 30 years or more, there comes a time to renew vows; and that's what this is about," he said during discussion of the informational meeting.

Wolberg was appointed by Co-op President Paul Bustamante to head a committee in charge of organizing an informational meeting.

The purpose of the public meeting is to inform member-owners — or anyone who pays for electricity with the SEC's service area — about resolutions to be brought up to vote by the general membership at the annual meeting.

According to its Web site, SEC is an electric utility that serves more than 13,000 consumers in Socorro, Valencia, Sierra and Cibola counties.

Dates for the informational and annual meetings have not been set, but could be determined at the board of trustees next meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 9.

District 5 Trustee Charlie Wagner, an outspoken supporter of many of the resolutions that were passed at district meetings in Socorro and Magdalena last October, had concerns about how the informational meeting will be handled.

"Are we having a meeting that's covered by the bylaws?" he asked.

Wolberg said he would prefer one formal informational meeting that would be open to all of the SEC's member-owners.

The bylaws don't cover "informational" meetings, per se. They do provide for special meetings to be called by resolution of the board of trustees, however, at which voting can take place.

The SEC's member-owners passed a series of reform-related resolutions last October after it came to light that the SEC's board of trustees earn significantly more compensation than any of the 18 other rural electric cooperatives operating in New Mexico.

Including fees paid to attend meetings, travel and insurance benefits, annual compensation has averaged more than \$25,000 per trustee in recent years.

Several of the resolutions passed at district meetings in Socorro and Magdalena are designed to reduce expenses incurred by the SEC's board of trustees. These include:

- Reducing the number of trustees from 11 to five.
- Reducing the number of board meetings per month from two to one.
- Limiting the amount of compensation a trustee can receive to \$10,000 per year.

Other resolutions — most of which were passed at the District 5 meeting in Magdalena, where Charlie Wagner, an outspoken advocate of the reform measures, was re-elected — address equitable representation and transparency. Among them are:

- Realign districts to make for as equal member populations as possible.
- Require the board of trustees adhere to the New Mexico Open Meetings Act.
- Require that meetings be advertised in monthly bills and local newspapers.
- Allow for a public comment period at regular meeting of the board of trustees.
- Allow member-owners open access to SEC books, records and audits.
- Arrange for a third-party accounting firm to conduct elections and allow for voting to be conducted by mail.

The idea to hold an informational meeting before the annual meeting was brought up late last year before the newly elected trustees — Wolberg, Prescilla Mauldin and Luis Aguilar — took their seats on the board.

At a December meeting, Bustamante said he supported the idea of holding an informational meeting to let people know about the resolutions passed by Wagner in District 5.

The comment came after District 1 trustee Leo Cordova of Veguita said that he wanted to put the word out that "District 1 is not involved with Charlie Wagner."

It was at that meeting that Wolberg — then only an audience member — urged the board to use the informational meeting as an opportunity to give answers to member-owners who feel alienated by the board.

"People need to understand what and why you do things," he told the board. "Yes, there will be some tough questions, but if you do this before the annual meeting I think it will resolve many issues."

During his first meeting on the board on Jan. 12, Wolberg said the board should do its part to mend its relationship with the member-owners.

"This is something that has to be done as a coherent entity. What we're about is trying to save the Co-op and turn it around," he said.

At the most recent board meeting, Wolberg continued to extoll the benefits of an informational meeting, saying holding such a meeting could only be positive.

Wolberg told the board that he had set up an e-mail account to gather input from the public. He said member-owners who wanted to voice their concerns on either side of the issue could send comments to him at sectellme@gmail.com.

"If anyone wants to vent, they can vent on me. I've got eight kids; I'm used to it," he quipped.

Cordova and District 3's Milton Ulibarri also serve on the informational meeting committee. Wolberg said he also welcomed input from the other members of the board.

Although the board and its member-owners have grown apart in recent years, an informational meeting could go a long way toward saving the marriage, Wolberg said.

"I see it as a real opportunity to get back on track," he said.