

SEC special meeting will be for information purposes only

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Socorro Electric Cooperative's informational meeting set Saturday, March 27, 1 p.m., at Finley Gym, will be just that — an informational meeting.

After the SEC's board of trustees emerged from a 50-minute executive session on Wednesday night (Feb. 24), SEC President Paul Bustamante made the announcement

"The special meeting on March 27 will be for informational purposes only. No voting will be allowed," he said.

The purpose of the meeting is to inform, clarify and answer questions about resolutions passed at district meetings last October in Districts 3 and 5 that are to be voted on by the SEC's member-owners at the annual meeting on Saturday, April 17.

Concerns over whether voting would take place at the informational meeting had been raised by District 5 trustee Charlie Wagner at previous board meetings. He noted that bylaws for the member-owned electric cooperative make no provisions for informational meetings.

Article III, Section 2 of the bylaws do allow for special meetings to be held, however, and Section 7 of the same article addresses "Voting at all Meetings."

The board discussed at length the complications and ramifications of such a meeting when it last met on Feb. 9.

With regard to voting, SEC attorney Dennis Francish said voting could only be conducted on items included in the meeting announcement to member-owners.

Little was said about the informational meeting on Wednesday, except for Bustamante's declaration following executive session.

During an interview the following day, Bustamante said the board wanted to take the voting element out of the equation.

"We're just going to let the people know (about the resolutions)," he said. "The chairman of the (informational meeting) committee, Donald Wolberg, thinks the majority of people don't know what these resolutions are about ... A special meeting is considered informational; it's not going to be conducted as business. The attorney will be there to explain. We'll try to get it where it's understandable to everyone."

Wolberg said at previous meetings that an informational meeting could help repair what has become a rather contemptuous relationship between the member-owners and the board of trustees. Many of the resolutions passed in Districts 3 and 5 had to do with reducing the board of trustees' expenses and compensation, including insurance benefits, and the manner in which it goes about conducting business.

Attorney Francish expressed his concerns about the resolutions at the Feb. 9 meeting. He said one resolution that called for reducing the number of trustees from 11 to five could potentially lead to multiple lawsuits from the trustees whose positions were eliminated. Another resolution that would require the SEC board to follow the Open Meetings Act was problematic, he said, in that it conflicted with the SEC's current bylaws. He said a resolution aimed at ensuring transparency by allowing member-owners access to books, audits and membership lists "won't fly," because the state supreme court has already made a ruling against it.

Bustamante said the board may adopt its own resolutions before the informational meeting that could be considered as "alternative" resolutions.

“We just don’t want any problems in the future. There could be issues down the road that could hurt the co-op. We want to educate members and make sure they understand that this is what can happen,” he said.

Asked if member-owners would still need to register at the informational meeting, Bustamante said that was something that hadn’t been discussed.

- General Manager Polo Pineda reported on a review and evaluation of the SEC’s system operations and maintenance conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development. The SEC scored “satisfactory” — the highest rating — on more than 60 items. Larry McGraw, general field representative for the USDA, gave an “Acceptable, but should be improved” rating for four items: “Inspection Records — Each Substation” under the Substation category; “Poles,” under the category of Line Order and Work Order Procedures; “Sectionalizing Equipment,” under Distribution — Underground Cable; and “Sectionalizing Study,” under Load Studies and Planning.

- Pineda announced the hiring of two new linemen: Jason Baca of Veguita, who is already certified as a lineman, and J.J. Apachito of Magdalena. Both will start their new jobs on Monday, March 1.

- Pineda reported the installation of a new computer software system. Although the cost is \$37,000, Pineda said the software is compatible with the current system and will save the SEC money in the long run.

Wagner questioned whether the SEC had sought competitive bids. Pineda said he’d check with other vendors regarding compatibility and price. The motion to accept the new software was passed after it was amended so that other options would be considered.

- Wagner also complained about the delinquent report, saying it doesn’t give enough information regarding the more than \$100,000 that are written off as bad debts each year. Pineda said he would look into ways to revise the report.

- Manny Marquez, the SEC’s representative to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, reported that House Bill 181 passed both the House and Senate during the recent 30-day legislative session.

The bill relates to public utilities, declaring that owners of certain renewable energy distributed generation facilities are not public utilities, providing for the creation of holding companies; establishing reporting requirements; and providing for public utility cost recovery.

The bill awaits the governor’s signature to be signed into law.

- Leroy Anaya, the SEC’s representative to Tri-State, which provides the power New Mexico electric cooperatives distribute, said a meeting will take place Tuesday and Wednesday, March 2-3, to discuss additional capital credit payments to member-owners.

The next SEC Board of Trustees meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 10, at 7 p.m.