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A Few Updates To Lift Spirits

[By Thomas J. Cole](#)

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Looking for a chuckle to start the day? How about an assurance that the bad guys get their due?

We have that and more in these updates on previous columns:

- Trustees at Socorro Electric Cooperative decide that picking a legal fight with all its members wasn't such a good idea.
- Federal agents seize computers and documents at the Indian Pueblos Federal Development Corp.
- A Tukumcari man gets the maximum sentence for nearly killing his sometimes-girlfriend while out of jail on a judge-approved furlough.

Now, for the update on the Socorro co-op, where trustees who control the utility and members seeking reforms have been fighting for about 2 1/2 years.

At a meeting last spring, the members — who are the co-op's owners and customers — overwhelmingly approved several reforms, including requirements that utility records and trustee meetings be open to the public.

The co-op, at the direction of a majority of its trustees, then filed a lawsuit against all its members in a bid to have a state district judge void the transparency requirements.

But an attorney for the co-op slammed the transmission into reverse last month, filing a request with the court that the lawsuit be dismissed.

"Basically, we're seeking to drop (the suit) because it was quite unpopular. The members didn't like it," co-op attorney Dennis Francish told El Defensor Chieftain newspaper.

Asked by the paper whether the request to dismiss was tantamount to an admission by the trustees that the suit was a mistake, Francish said, "No. It's saying that after the board decided to bring the lawsuit, they decided to drop it."

That may remind you of that inarticulate quote from Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., about how he actually voted for funding for the Iraq war in 2003 before he voted against it.

The co-op may be trying to can the suit because it opened the door for some members to file

cross-claims against individual trustees that allege improper spending, failure to follow by-laws and other wrongdoing.

In those claims, members are represented by a couple heavy-hitting attorneys: former state prosecutor Lee Deschamps of Socorro and William Ikard of Austin, Texas, who helped members of a corrupt co-op there win a \$23 million settlement with their utility.

Deschamps says the cross-claims against the trustees will be pursued even if a judge allows dismissal of the co-op suit.

There have been other recent developments at the co-op, including disclosure of insider loans, the firing of its general manager, discovery that customers were overcharged nearly \$1.8 million and a planned rate increase because of financial woes.

Cleaning house

IRS agents this summer seized equipment and just about every scrap of paper they could find at the Albuquerque office of the Indian Pueblos Federal Development Corp., says Mike Canfield, the corporation's president.

Canfield says that the agents assured him the corporation wasn't the target of the investment, but that they declined to say who or what is.

So far, the IRS has returned none of the documents and only one of the computers, he says. "It is certainly inconvenient," Canfield says.

The corporation — owned by New Mexico's 19 pueblos — teamed with private developers to construct two buildings in the mid-2000s that were then leased to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The corporation and its partners received millions of dollars in questionable payments made from money borrowed for the construction. At the same time, the corporation went basically broke.

Canfield, a member of Laguna Pueblo and a longtime board member of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, is part of a new leadership team appointed by pueblo governors in hopes of cleaning up the mess.

Getting even

Amber Simpson's head swelled to the size of a basketball after she was beaten in July 2009 by on-again, off-again boyfriend Moses Earl Ingram.

At the time, Ingram was out of jail on an unsupervised furlough to visit his kids by another woman.

State District Judge Albert Mitchell Jr. approved the furlough despite Ingram's history of beating up women, including Simpson. He was in jail awaiting trial in two domestic violence cases.

Mitchell told Ingram to stay away from Simpson, but he beat her up a few days into the two-week furlough.

Simpson's father stopped just short of calling the judge an idiot. Mitchell said judges sometimes make mistakes.

Ingram, 31, was convicted last month of five felonies, including the kidnapping and

attempted murder of Simpson, according to the Quay County Sun newspaper. He was given the max of 31 1/2 years in prison.

The sentencing judge was Mitchell.

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