

Letters to the Editor (04/16/15)

SEC Board doesn't deserve support

Several years ago the membership of the Socorro Electrical Co-op decided that the Board of Trustees was out of control, and at the annual meeting voted to change the bylaws.

I attended that meeting, and I can verify that the votes for every one of the changes were grossly lop-sided. The members resoundingly voiced their displeasure!

Since then, the board has done their very best to ignore those changes, even to the extent of taking the membership to court.

Their arrogance and belligerence is once again rearing its ugly head. They are convening a special meeting on Saturday, April 25 for the purpose of voting to repeal the uncomfortable, existing bylaws and adopt a board-friendlier revised set of bylaws.

A few observations:

- Term limits

Most of the trustees had been on the board for decades, some taking over board positions from their parents. So, the membership voted to allow a trustee to only serve two 3-year terms.

The new proposed bylaws have no mention of term limits.

- Number of trustees

The Board consisted of more than a dozen trustees. The membership voted to reduce the number of trustees to five.

The new proposed bylaws want to increase the number to seven.

- Compensation

Trustees were compensated handsomely for their service, training and travel, arguably too handsomely. The membership voted to cap trustee compensation.

The new proposed bylaws eliminate the pay cap. The ballot you have or will receive in the mail is somewhat tricky, probably just a coincidence. You will have to unfold it to even find the "NO." Then you have to "complete the arrow" next to your vote. Please be sure to read the yellow sheet of paper that comes with the package.

It is my view point that the Board of Trustees has not behaved honorably or nobly. They have ignored the behest of the membership, and they quite possibly resent being bothered by the members that elected them and that they allegedly serve.

The Board of Trustees does not deserve our support! Please join me and vote "NO" to repeal the existing bylaws.

That's my nickel,

Gene Brown

Quemado

Co-op should be controlled by members

What an interesting, strong trio of letters that appeared in the April 9, 2015 El Defensor Chieftain, to be read and re-read by those of us in the Socorro Electric Cooperative (SEC) who continue to be outraged by the activities of the SEC Board.

The latest such activity of the board is its effort to get new bylaws for the co-op, and the authors of all three letters are suggesting that our outrage is appropriate and telling us clearly that if the proposed bylaws are voted in at the special meeting on April 25, we will essentially reinstate the conditions against which we have fought for so long.

In their simplest form, the proposed bylaws boil down to this: the board will control the co-op. An electric cooperative must be controlled by its members, not by its board. Therefore, I urge the members, on April 25, to vote against the proposed bylaws.

Sincerely,

Fancher Gotesky

Magdalena

Adversarial behavior about SEC needs to stop

I received in the mail our ballot from the Socorro Electric Cooperative. Since we are going to be out of town on the day of the SEC annual meeting, we opted to vote by mail. After some discussion, my wife and I opted to vote "yes" for the proposed bylaws.

When we moved to New Mexico 15 years ago, I was totally ignorant of how the cooperative worked; as long as the lights came on when I flipped the switch and the bills were not too outrageous, I was content. I really appreciated the efforts of Trustee Charles Wagner in bringing to light many of the problems within the co-op and in leading the effort to get these changed.

This battle has been, however, long and protracted and not always pleasant to watch. I am growing weary of the accusations, vitriol and backbiting and feel that the time has come when we need to accept the present proposed bylaws and get on with the operation of the co-op in a positive and productive manner.

While the reformers have not obtained all that they were seeking, they have accomplished a great deal, including casting off the apathy that so many members felt towards the co-op. If we maintain this spirit of involvement, but in a positive manner, it is my opinion that we will be able to progress further and faster than if we continue our adversarial behavior.

Ian Jenness

Magdalena

Proposed bylaws take away member control

Last Saturday, I received a letter and large postcard from the Socorro Electric Cooperative and Board President Anne Dorough. Her letter and the card are in disagreement with the points made by the three letters published by SEC owner/members published in last Thursday's paper.

Dorough's letter recommended placing the North Carolina expert's proposed bylaws side-by-side with the current SEC bylaws for comparison which, I agree is a fair way and the only right way to judge the respective merits of each article and section. However, I disagree with Mrs. Dorough's conclusions.

I have been doing the comparison and find too many reasons to disagree with the board President's view that the "expert's" bylaws are any improvement. They are not. Most of what I have compared remove member control and make it more burdensome for members to control the historical bad behavior of the board's excessive spending. It becomes much more difficult for the members to remove a delinquent trustee. It makes it easier for the board to remove a fellow trustee whose independent judgment conflicts with the "good ole boy" self interest we have seen in the current board members.

It will be much more difficult if not impossible for the members to propose bylaw amendments. The cap on expenses can be adjusted by the members when trustees begin to show a willingness to be accountable and fair. The co-op can place trustee compensation and expenses on the web page instead of www.guidestar.org. The loss of district meetings is also a serious benefit reduction to members as well as the most serious reduction in members' democratic control, for a membership as small as the SEC's.

Term limits is another item in disagreement. As more people experience two terms on the board and others serve two terms, the community benefits by having more members who have experienced board service and more opportunity for electing respected former trustees over the years. We have had trustees who experienced the same one year of trustee ship thirty times with no improvement in knowledge and skill.

As cluttered as the present open meetings act bylaw is with unnecessary references to agencies which don't exist in the co-op, the rules on meetings, notice and minutes are more familiar and there is a guide we can read to assure compliance. Likewise, inspection of records is assured because the present bylaws presume members have a proper purpose which does not have to be recited to obtain a members list or a regular document as opposed to one which the law considers to be an exception. The "expert's" rule allows a records custodian to quibble and force the requester to know and enforce the "rule of law" perhaps having to retain a lawyer. Vote by mail is not guaranteed in the new bylaws by a clearly stated bylaw but simply referred to in passing. The Credentials and Elections Committee may be members only but it is appointed by the Board of Trustees, a problem with the present lack of trust.

In summarizing my remarks I must admit that although I have not completed my side-by-side comparison, everyone should recognize that many of the recommended changes by the expert are those which we the members have already achieved through our efforts in 2009 through 2010. Vote by mail, open meetings, inspection of records, controlling trustee spending, video broadcasting of trustee meetings by Mr. James Cherry on www.informedcynic.com, all of which have been opposed by the current board members and their attorneys past and present.

Mr. Christensen was hired and paid by the Board of Trustees and management. While the members are faced with a flat YES or No on the entire package, the board was able to make changes to both bylaws and policies. Unfortunately the special meeting vote scheduling has interrupted and disregarded processes already in progress which was to have member proposals approved at the 2014 district members meetings, presented to the membership May 16, 2015 Regular Annual Members Meeting.

The proposed bylaws and the timing of the vote interferes with members right to democratically control their co-op allowing a small group of just the manager, three trustees and two attorneys to strategically remove the will of the quorum of members at two district meetings and prevent them from being voted upon by mail and in person at the 2015 Annual Members Meeting. I have seen enough of the traditional guile to know that I must vote "NO" for the sake of the long abused membership of Socorro Electric Cooperative?
See you at the meeting.

Lee Scholes

Magdalena

Not happy with co-op spending

The Socorro Electric Cooperative is a business. Until its meetings are conducted as a business instead of a carnival, I will not attend a meeting. I object to money being spent to give prizes, food and what is next? Exotic dancers and jugglers to entertain us?

According to Mr. Christensen, who is responsible for the new proposed bylaws, "Drawings for televisions, appliances and \$25 bill credits are not unusual ..." (See Part IV Analysis of Discrete Issues). Makes me wonder about the veracity of the new bylaws he has proposed that we are to vote for (or against).

I also am outraged regarding the amount of money being spent on the volume of propaganda sent to entice me to attend a meeting to vote for new bylaws. We have already voted for bylaws which have been ignored by the board.

When there is a meeting that addresses business and suspends trooping of the colors, invocation, speeches, introduction of employees, notification of scholarships (won by board members' relatives) and doesn't spend money for enticements but focuses on business, I will attend.

Until then, I will find something more meaningful to do with my time.

Ruth White

Socorro