

Co-op election recount sought

http://www.dchieftain.com/news/co-op-election-recount-sought/article_0620b3b2-2aa1-11e7-b776-7beb7e78d714.html

John Larson – El Defensor Chieftain staff writer Apr 27, 2017 Updated Apr 27, 2017

Members of the Socorro Electric Cooperative met at Macey Center for their annual meeting Saturday to cast their votes in two trustee elections.

The number of registered members totaled 430. Three percent of 8,277 (248) was needed for a quorum.

Members attending were able to cast their votes in two separate races. Votes cast with mail-in ballots were added to the in-person votes. In both races mail-in ballots generally accounted for roughly 80 percent of the votes.

For District II, incumbent Judy Holcomb handily defeated challenger Melanie Kelly by a 812-489 vote to retain her seat. Holcomb garnered 59.77 percent of the vote compared to Kelly's 40.23 percent.

In the tight District III race former SEC Trustee Luis Aguilar bested Cindy Rivera by the slim margin of four votes. Aguilar received 829 votes, or 50.77 percent. Rivera received 825 votes, or 49.88 percent.

Cindy Rivera is now asking for a recount, citing Section 4.12 of the co-op's bylaws.

According to the bylaws in order for a recount, "the margin of the contested race must be less than five percent of the total number of votes." In this case the margin is less than one-fourth of one percent (.24 percent) or four out of 1,654. The by-laws also specify that the request for a recount must be submitted to the General Manager within three business days after the election, and that the election committee shall be reconvened within seven and 30 days after the filing of the request.

In a letter to General Manager Joseph Herrera dated April 24 Rivera formally asked for the recount and that she be present at the recount. Rivera also requested to "have any disqualified ballots that were not counted" on hand.

During the business portion of Saturday's meeting members were given the cooperative's financial situation. In the year 2016, the SEC brought in \$25,186,667 and spent \$23,946,456, leaving a net income of \$1,240,211.

District II member and 49th District Representative Gail Armstrong spoke briefly and voiced her commitment in supporting the cooperative. She also said she was committed to working for all people of the district (stressing water rights) and her votes in the Legislature would be guided by that principle rather than a political agenda.

In his opening remarks Herrera told the member-owners the cooperative has just wrapped up an automated metering infrastructure pilot project with technology "that is supported by the vendor to get metering data using the same method to transmit the meter data through our power lines."

"We've gone from Microsoft Windows Vista to Windows Server 2016 with hardware to run the new supported technology, which makes it possible for us to have more energy data than we've ever had before," Herrera told the audience. "Now we get meter reads every hour versus reads every 27 hours."

He said the new technology will be deployed system wide over the next couple of years.

Herrera said for the fifth consecutive year the co-op conducted a General Retirement of Patronage Capital Credit.

“Working with the 25-year retirement cycle the co-op retired nearly half of million dollars of Patronage Capital Credit for the General Retirement for the years of 1990, and 20 percent of 1991 in December of 2016,” he said.

Herrera also brought up the Operation Round-Up program the co-op is kicking off in June for the purpose of assisting low income and elderly members who may have trouble paying their electric bill.

“If you opt-in to Operation Round-Up your electric bill will be rounded up to the nearest dollar,” he said. “So if your electric bill is \$49.99 and you have opted in to the program your bill would be rounded up to the next dollar amount and you would pay \$50. The penny goes toward Operation Round-Up. As we say every little penny counts.”

The 501c3 program is completely separate from the Board of Trustees and will be made up of volunteers. “If you are interested please stop by the office,” Herrera said.

National Lineman Appreciation Day was April 18, and that fact was not lost on Herrera.

“Our crews work tireless hours to keep the lights on,” he said. “At times, having to leave their families at dinner time and work into the morning hours to restore power to our members. To them I am grateful for their dedication and as well as all the staff at your cooperative.”

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