



Wagner re-elected as Co-op trustee

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Charlie Wagner was re-elected to the Socorro Electric Cooperatives Board of Trustees and a bevy of reform-related propositions he supports were overwhelmingly approved at the District 5 annual meeting in Magdalena on Saturday, Oct. 10.

Wagner, who has been an outspoken critic of his fellow trustees and a crusader for reform during his first four-year term, won a majority of support over two challengers. He earned 125 votes, while Godin "Dean" Otero of Magdalena garnered 100 votes and Clark Bishop of Datil received five during an election held at the Our Lady of Magdalene Catholic Church Parish Hall.

Wagner, who resides in Magdalena, said the support he received from the western reaches of District 5 helped put him over the top.

"It was a close race," Wagner said, noting his 25-vote margin of victory. "I'm grateful that so many people came out with such a good turnout from as far away as Quemado. What made the difference was being able to attract people from all over."

Bill Green, superintendent of schools in Quemado, was elected as chairperson for the meeting. Cracking an occasional joke and using self-effacing humor, Green set a tone of levity at a meeting that addressed hot-button issues calling for radical changes.

After Green announced the election results, District 5 members approved several reform measures to be considered for adoption by SEC member-owners at next year's annual meeting.

Most of the propositions dealt directly with reducing costs incurred by the Co-op's board of trustees and the manner in which board meetings and elections are conducted.

The propositions included measures that would:

- Reduce the number of board members from 11 to five
- Divide the SEC service area into five districts of substantially equal populations of members

and each district would be represented by just one trustee.

- Restrict trustees to serving no more than two consecutive terms on the board, after which they would be required to sit out an election cycle before being eligible to return to the board.
- Limit the number of regular board meetings to one per month, as opposed to the two monthly meetings the Co-op board now conducts.
- Call for board meetings to be open to the public and members of the press and provide notice of meetings through monthly billing statements and local newspapers.
- Place public comment as an agenda item at each regular meeting to allow member-owners to address the board without having to obtain prior approval.
- Permit member-owners open access to financial records, audits and member lists, except those that would violate the Privacy Act.
- Allow for mail-in voting for Co-op elections and have a third-party accounting firm administer the elections.

In addition, three other proposals were passed, two of which were introduced by Jack Bruton, the other trustee representing District 5.

The first would restrict the board from making contributions to adult and civic organizations. Bruton said he would rather see money previously spent with such groups be allocated to youth in the form of scholarships.

To assure the same oversight that occurred at last year's annual meeting was not repeated, Bruton made a motion that all propositions approved at that night's meeting would be presented for approval at the SEC's annual meeting.

At last year's District 5 meeting in Datil, the accepted proposals were rejected for consideration at the annual meeting because it was not specifically stated in the motion that they were to be brought before the overall membership.

Co-op member Jack Fairweather of Magdalena introduced a motion that the SEC board and management would notify its member-owners of patronage credits, or capital credits, on an annual basis.

Fairweather noted that this policy is already an existing bylaw but that it hasn't been exercised until recently. Fairweather said he introduced the motion to "make a point" with the board and management that they are required to follow the bylaws.

Wagner's victory and the propositions for reform came a week after three board incumbents were unseated at the District 3 meeting in Socorro.

Wagner said his win and those of the three challengers last week in Socorro sends a message to the SEC's board of trustees that they need to "clean up their act."

"They have to put their self interests aside and look at the Co-op members as being Number

One,” he said. “The members come first, then the employees and the trustees are way down the list.”

Before the election results were announced, trustee Juan Gonzales — one of the incumbents voted out in Socorro after more than 30 years on the board — told the District 5 membership that the truth has not been told about the Co-op.

Although he didn’t name names, Gonzales apparently was referring to Wagner when he said that a Co-op “member from Louisiana” got things “stirred up” about the board and hadn’t been truthful.

“I’m telling you, in April we’ll have an annual meeting and you’ll learn what this member has done to the Co-op,” he said. “You have not heard the truth about what this Co-op is all about.”

Gonzales went on to say that the SEC has been moving in the right direction and that he is proud of his contributions to the board. He said that he always worked for the benefit of the entire Co-op and not just members in his own district.