

Is the SEC doing enough with renewable energy?

by Scott Turner — El Defensor Chieftain Editor - May 3, 2018

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Is Socorro Electric Cooperative doing enough with renewable energy?

That seemed to be the major question among members at its 73rd Annual Members Meeting this past Saturday at the Macey Center on the New Mexico Tech campus.

SEC General Manager Joseph Herrera and Board of Trustees President Anne Dorough responded to questions about the cooperative's commitment to using renewable energy.

Both told the membership that 30 percent of the electricity it purchases from Tri-State Generation and Transmission is renewable energy.

The cooperative's contract with Tri-State allows it to use renewable energy up to 5 percent from other sources. The cooperative's membership was told that the SEC has not exercised that right.

Ward McCartney questioned whether the cooperative was doing enough.

"I think this board needs to get on a plan and have a goal of going renewable 100 percent or 80 percent within 10 years because the cost savings are there for us," McCartney said.

McCartney expressed a belief that the use of renewable energy could lower electricity costs, and mentioned the investment and job opportunities available in the wind and solar industry in New Mexico.

"The whole way of producing energy has changed," McCartney said.

Herrera challenged the assertion that renewable energy could lower utility costs. He used California as an example. He cited rates from some of the municipalities.

"When a state goes to 100 percent renewable, this is the price you have to live with," Herrera said.

"You have to find a balance," Herrera added. "You have to have a resource of mixes because the wind doesn't always blow. The sun doesn't shine all of the time. You have to have a balance. We're here to provide you with reliability."

Dorough said the SEC "studies the situation and the information that is available."

"We try to make a decision for your co-op that's in the best interest of everybody within the co-op," Dorough said.

Magdalena area resident Pete Morris expressed a view that the membership wanted the SEC to continue to explore the use of renewable energy, and wants the SEC to provide more detail of studies, especially in particular to how it relates to Socorro County.

One of the criticisms during public comment was that Herrera provided statistics from large metropolitan areas, which Herrera acknowledged was making "an apples-to-oranges" comparison.

“I would like to see us compared to other counties in New Mexico rather than California,” Sandra Knoll said.

Dorough said the renewable energy issue is at the top of the list when the SEC Board discusses strategic planning.

Outside of the renewable energy discussion, there was little drama at the meeting compared to last year when an SEC Board of Trustees seat was decided by four votes.

Although two seats were open this time around, no election was held.

That was because only current Board of Trustees members Donald Wolberg and Leroy Anaya qualified for the two available District III seats.

Credentials and Elections Committee Chairman Peter Gonzales quoted SEC by-laws that allowed the committee to suspend balloting and declare the candidates trustees if no other people qualified for the seats. That is the action the committee took, Gonzales said. The committee consisted of seven co-op members, Gonzales said.

There were 452 people registered for the meeting, Dorough said. Dorough said 3 percent of the membership was needed for a quorum, or 250 members.

The SEC Board Secretary-Treasurer Mary Baca reported the cooperative had an income of a little more than \$1.5 million. She gave a financial report that included unaudited numbers.

Dorough said the audited numbers would be posted on the SEC’s website once the audit is complete.