

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

