

Setting the record straight

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In recent months I have worked with members of the cooperative to present, explain and gather feedback on the proposed rate adjustment and any other issues members have.

In a letter to *The Taos News* recently I admitted I could have done a better job listening to our members and committed to do so going forward. A local solution is better than one from an outside party. That said, we will continue this parallel path of cooperating with the PRC during the hearing process to attain fair, reasonable rates for all.

In some previous My Turns or letters to the editor, authors have misled and fabricated issues in an attempt to instill fear and doubt in our members' minds. It's troubling because these individuals have been to rate and board meetings and round tables on diversification and seem to agree and understand the goals of the cooperative.

Yet they then write as if they hadn't been there at all. So let me set the record straight.

First, the Taos County Complex issue. In Jerome Lucero's My Turn he said there were no RUS specifications on electrical connections and that requiring changes was "retaliation." The fact is there are specifications and the county complex was designed improperly.

Additionally, staff brought up this design information as far back as August 2008. Yet the architect still designed to PNM specifications. We met with Commissioners Barrone and Jaramillo as well as the contractor to find solutions that met RUS specifications while saving the county "change order" costs.

Second, some have been critical of debt acquired to build transmission and distribution lines to the Penasco and Picuris Valley, Carson and Ojo Caliente area, the underground upgrades to the Taos Pueblo and Gusdorf areas, and solar array programs, saying these projects were not needed and we should not have borrowed funds for these projects.

We believe these projects were needed because every member of the cooperative should have reliable power.

The board feels every member should have adequate service, regardless of where they live. Members in the outlying areas and Native Americans should not be forgotten simply because they do not live within Taos.

When the cooperative built infrastructure in other areas of our system such as Taos proper and small communities near it, we took on debt to do it. In the cooperative spirit, folks in the outlying areas were OK with that — paying their electric bill for years without complaint.

We should continue to support those folks when they, in turn, need upgrades.

We also believe that our solar program needs to be part of our energy portfolio so we can continue to become less dependent on fossil fuels in the future and a little less reliant on our outside power supplier.

Third, regarding diversification issues, the misinformation is that diversification is causing rates to increase. That is wrong and some who say otherwise know better.

Truth is a quorum of the members in 2000 voted unanimously to enter into propane, telecommunications, and Internet services and to help create jobs. The board obliged and the diversification projects have since been a tremendous success.

Kit Carson Propane has helped people who were struggling to make ends meet. The Internet division was formed to bridge the "digital divide," again for more rural and low-income customers and areas Qwest did not want to serve.

Today affordable Internet access is available to all regardless of where they live or how much they make. We are on the cutting edge as well with our Fiber to the Home project that will offer the fastest Internet speeds in the Southwest at the most affordable cost.

Finally, the Board of Kit Carson created 1,100 jobs at the ACT and Pencro Call Centers.

The Broadband project will provide over 300 more good paying jobs over the next 36 months. At a time when jobs are sorely needed, the board has answered the call.

Fiber to the Home will also enable more people to work from home, further improving our economic situation as it also provides for smart grid applications.

With all the positive projects and events at the cooperative, why would some want to deny our members affordable propane, high paying jobs, high speed Internet and solar power? Please remember that our low-income neighbors would not be able to afford badly needed services without some of our programs. It is time for the community to come together toward solutions to enhance our quality of life here in Northern New Mexico, not create fear and mislead our members for their personal grievances or to pursue other agendas.

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